

**An Analysis of the Primary School English Language Curriculum  
in Hong Kong, 1967-97**

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy  
In  
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Abstract of thesis entitled:

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Submitted by  
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for the degree of **Master of Philosophy**  
at **The Chinese University of Hong Kong**  
in **June 2002**

The present study examines the historical development of the primary school English language curriculum in Hong Kong. Official English syllabuses were issued in 1967, 1976, 1981 and 1997 in order to inform the planned English language curricula. These strategic reference books resemble a lighthouse that guides teachers towards a theoretically sound direction in the plethora of methods, models and approaches. Particularly, each syllabus captures the essence of English Language Teaching (ELT) ideologies of that particular period. As such, three specific research questions are explored in this thesis:

- RQ 1. What are the major ELT methodologies that are promoted in the four primary English syllabuses (1967, 1976, 1981 & 1997)?
- RQ 2. What are the theoretical assumptions and pedagogical features that characterize the ELT methodologies in the syllabuses?
- RQ 3. What are the impacts of ELT methodologies to the syllabus design?

In order to explore these questions, the primary English syllabuses were collected and compared with literatures concerning ELT methodologies in foreign/second language acquisition research. Semi-structured interviews with government officials, teacher-educators and teachers were conducted to supplement in-depth insights beyond printed documents. The pedagogical features were analyzed with Johnson's (1977) curriculum analysis framework.

Results from documentary analysis and interviews revealed that the Oral-Structural Approach (OSA), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) are the key ELT methodologies promoted during the past four decades. Each syllabus presented unlike cognizance of language and language learning, whereas taxonomies of syllabus types and their relations with ELT methodologies were displayed. Hitherto, Hong Kong has enjoyed the colonial legacy to import and adopt several theoretically-sound foreign models into local usage. It is anticipated that synthesizing local experience and Western models can significantly enhance English language education.



## 論文摘要

### 香港小學英語課程分析(1967-97)

本項研究旨在探討香港小學英語課程的歷史性發展概況。在1967年、1976年、1981年及1997年，官方分別編制了四套英語課程綱要，提供了小學英語課程的設計大綱。這四套課程綱要具有指引性的作用，給予教師在眾多教學方法中一個具理論基礎的教學方向。這些策略性的參考文件匯聚了當時英語教學方法的精粹。在此，本項研究提出了三個研究提問：

研問一：在四套小學英語課程綱要中，教育署推廣了哪幾種英語教學方法？

研問二：在這幾種英語教學方法中，分別包含了甚麼理論基礎和教學法特徵？

研問三：英語教學方法和課程綱要之間有著甚麼關係？

基於以上提問，研究員搜集了四套課程綱要和「英語作為外語/第二語言」的英語教學方法文獻，然後作出比較和批判性的分析。研究員也與教育署課程發展主任(英文組)、教育學者及在職教師進行半引導式訪問，以取得更具體的見解。此外，為使分析教學法特徵更有系統，研究員採用了Johnson (1977)所建立的一套指引。

研究結果顯示，「口語結構法」、「傳意式語文教學」及「任務為本的語文教學」在過去四十年依次被推廣為重點英語教學方法。這些方法分別包含了它們對語言及語言學習不同的理論基礎和教學見解。此外，研究結果展示了英語教學方法和課程綱要有著互相牽引的關係。從殖民地時代開始，香港不斷從海外引入和採用有理論基礎的英語教育方案，至今已累積了相當的應用經驗，對改善整體英語教育有所幫助。



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AI	Advisory Inspectorate
CDC	Curriculum Development Committee
CDC	Curriculum Development Council
CDI	Curriculum Development Institute
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
ECR	Education Commission Report
ED	Education Department
ED	Experience Dimension
ELT	English Language Teaching
HKBLDF	Hong Kong Bank Language Development Fund
HKEA	Hong Kong Examinations Authority
ID	Interpersonal Dimension
ILE	Institute of Language in Education
KD	Knowledge Dimension
KLA	Key Learning Areas
KS 1	Key Stage 1
KS 2	Key Stage 2
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
OSA	Oral-Structural Approach
RQ 1	Research Question 1

RQ 2	Research Question 2
RQ 3	Research Question 3
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TBLT	Task-Based Language Teaching
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
TOC	Target Oriented Curriculum
TTRA	Targets and Target-Related Assessment



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

As a part of Hong Kong's colonial legacy, English has been a de jure co-official language with Chinese (i.e., Cantonese), and Teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language (TEFL/TESL) has been taking place in Hong Kong since the 1840s (Evans, 1998). Nowadays, pupils in Hong Kong formally start learning English when they enter primary schools, and many more children even receive English training as early as in kindergartens and nursery schools. From then, pupils are exposed up to eleven or twelve 35-minute-English lessons weekly. That is, almost 17 per cent to 22 per cent of total school time is devoted to English Language Teaching (ELT) (CDC, 2000).

Despite extensive exposure to English and established traditions of English language education in this bilingual city, a good learning outcome has not been guaranteed. For example, a recent article accompanying a catchy headline in the *Hong Kong iMail*—‘The decline and fall of the English language: Two-thirds of Primary Six students below Primary Two level’ (Appendix I) reported an alarming fact:

The study found that 86 per cent of Primary Six pupils failed to reach the Primary Four English textbook level after being tested, with 66 per cent below Primary Two standards. (Ng, 2001, p. A2)

The report discloses that there is a serious mismatch between pupils' English proficiencies and the textbooks that they are using. The majority of pupils cannot



benefit from the officially recommended textbooks<sup>1</sup>, and some pupils even fall far behind the expected English level attainment. In fact, this problem can be partly attributed to the intimate relations between textbooks and syllabus. Many textbook writers depend on the guidelines given in the government initiated primary school English syllabus in order to design suitable teaching materials. A centrally-devised syllabus, thus, lends important insights to the intended language curriculum and subsequently, materials development. For the above reasons, a more careful inspection of Hong Kong's syllabuses is necessary for it will provide insights concerning ELT curricula and methodologies.

#### 1.1.1 Syllabus

Many countries constantly devote effort and money to improve the quality of education (UNESCO, 1991). Hong Kong is no exception to this irresistible movement as the government always hopes to design and adopt sound ELT curricula to improve the English standard of the general public. Improvement of a syllabus, by default, becomes a typical and legitimate starting point for curriculum reform. So, what is a *syllabus*? The notion is complicated and sometimes people have mistaken expectations of it, expectations that ought to be clarified:

Teachers do not take a syllabus into the classroom and teach from it. They are not expected to do so, and many teachers, perhaps most, never read their subject-area syllabuses. In this sense, a syllabus is not addressed to teachers. Certainly a syllabus is not addressed to the learner. (Johnson, 1981, p. 39)

Then, what constitutes a *syllabus* and to whom is the *syllabus* directed? Johnson

---

<sup>1</sup> The Textbook Coordinating Committee has sanctioned all local primary textbooks, including those of the English language subject, before they can be adopted for use in local primary schools.

(1981) offers a narrow definition of a *syllabus* by specifying its goals:

The first responsibility of a syllabus committee, or a syllabus writer is to make explicit the aims and expectations of society in terms of a particular subject-area discipline; that is, to provide operational definitions of the ends to be achieved and the means for achieving them. This is usually done by listing the content and skills to be covered in the teaching programme and the criteria to be met in the organization and presentation of the teaching materials as learning experience. (pp. 41-42)

Apart from scholarly explanations, the Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) of Hong Kong also tenders a broad definition of *syllabus* relevant to local situation:

It is generally agreed that the syllabus is a key element in the curriculum, a revision of the syllabus which takes into account the new insights and understanding made available to us through the experience of teachers and from recent research is a step which must be taken if any improvement in present standards of proficiency in English in Hong Kong schools is to be achieved. (1981, p. 7)

By and large, a *syllabus* resembles scaffolding—a supporting structure that guides teachers and pupils learning by specifying goals and operational content of the teaching activities and by integrating updated research regarding the nature of language and language acquisition. The importance of a syllabus is self-explanatory in this light.

### 1.1.2 Syllabus and Curriculum

The relationship between a *syllabus* and a *curriculum* can be simple and straightforward: “a syllabus is only one part of a well-designed curriculum” (Young, 1981, p. 52). Besides a hierarchical relation, a more technical distinction between these terms can be found in Pierson’s (1981) work. He implies that a *syllabus* often serves a descriptive function whereas a *curriculum* tends to provide



an explanatory dimension in addition to the descriptive function:

A more technical understanding of curriculum, found within the framework of curriculum development theory, is those sets of intended learning outcomes or structured sets of learning experiences which aim at achieving such outcomes. A syllabus, on the other hand, is a condensed outline or statement of the main points of a course of study. (p. 26)

That is to say, a syllabus is a repository of teaching and learning specifications of the intended curriculum. Often, a syllabus is the product of curriculum planning and development. Although there is hardly a consensus on the definitions of syllabus and curriculum, a thorough discussion of the scope and nature of these two terms can avoid ambiguities arising in subsequent analysis.

## **1.2 Infrastructure of English Language Curriculum in Hong Kong**

The Hong Kong education enterprise consists of two centralized agencies which are responsible for the curriculum issues, namely the Hong Kong Examinations Authority (HKEA) and Curriculum Development Council (CDC), previously the Curriculum Development Committee. The CDC is an advisory body on curriculum policy and it produces syllabuses as well as other curriculum documents whereas the HKEA focuses on curriculum implementation. These two officialdoms cooperate to mandate that English is taught properly throughout primary and secondary levels. Other related agencies such as the Curriculum Development Institute (CDI), the Advisory Inspectorate (AI) and the primary and secondary English subject committees within the Education Department (ED) also play a part in the English language curriculum development. Further details can be obtained from Sze & Wong's (1999) article; for their comprehensive review of



the English language curriculum development in Hong Kong.

### **1.3 Research Focus**

This thesis traces the historical development of the primary school English language curriculum in Hong Kong from 1960s onwards. English language syllabuses, which are officially issued artefacts, inform the intended English curriculum and language teaching methodologies which are deemed crucial to TEFL/TESL. While many other curriculum studies have been focusing on the implementation of ELT approaches and are readily available elsewhere, the general theoretical and particular pedagogical specifications will be the foci in this study. Although official syllabuses serve as curriculum guidelines, they can impinge on classroom teaching and learning of English to a great extent: “In the case of Hong Kong the official syllabus plays a crucial role in shaping students’ learning experience through the government’s legislation on the provision of schooling” (Sze & Wong, 1999, p. 272). Therefore, the syllabuses are the primary sources of data in this study.

Using semi-structured interviews with important personnel from different domains and an in-depth analysis of the primary English syllabuses, the present study seeks to explore and compare various facets of the English Language Teaching methodologies. The objectives and research questions of this academic inquiry are described in the following section.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The goal of this thesis is to provide an analytical overview of the changing

ideas in the four volumes of primary English syllabuses in Hong Kong, and explore the development of prevailing ELT methodologies. Three research questions (i.e., RQ 1, RQ 2 & RQ 3) accompanying the corresponding objectives are addressed below:

*RQ 1. What are the major ELT methodologies that are promoted in the four primary English syllabuses (1967, 1976, 1981 & 1997)?*

- a) to identify and interpret the syllabuses according to their philosophies and intended practices of ELT
- b) to categorize syllabuses with similar ELT principles for subsequent analysis

*RQ 2. What are the theoretical assumptions and pedagogical features that characterize the ELT methodologies in the syllabuses?*

- a) to heuristically explore the origins, theories of language and language learning of the particular English Language Teaching methodology
- b) to critically analyze the pedagogical features using an analytical framework

*RQ 3. What are the impacts of ELT methodologies to the syllabus design?*

- a) to investigate the intertwining relationship of the type of syllabus arising from different beliefs and practices of ELT

## **1.5 Significance**

A syllabus is a curriculum reference for many educational parties including teachers and it tends to have a direct bearing in TEFL/TESL. As this study

involves coverage of materials for the past forty years or so, it would be both of historical and practical value to examine syllabuses as individual units discretely and to trace emergent trends chronologically.

Studying the syllabus is strategically important in language education and applied linguistics, and it also contributes to materials development. The ultimate goal is to improve pupils' learning. The present study seeks to understand as clearly as possible what a syllabus is rather than what it may become. Thus, the study is data-driven.

However, this study has been neither designed nor conducted with the primary goal of criticizing various language teaching methodologies suggested in the primary English syllabuses. It is both important to collect and reflect on evidence of curriculum artefacts and documents to inform the historical coherence of the English language curriculum development in primary schools of Hong Kong.

Apart from educational insights in general, the researcher realized the intimate relation between applied linguistics and language curriculum. Pierson (1981) has argued that applied linguistics also illuminates the study of curriculum:

One invaluable source of curriculum content comes from the relatively new discipline of applied linguistics. This is a field that capitalizes on the recent findings of linguists and psychologists for pedagogical purposes. Applied linguistics represents a very specific source of what is known, learnable, and teachable in language. (p. 32)

Hence, this thesis facilitates the comparison of curriculum documents and second language acquisition research so as to highlight the predominant ELT



methodologies suggested in the syllabuses. This study therefore keeps abreast of insights from curriculum development and second language acquisition, which showcases the interdisciplinary nature of applied linguistics.

## **1.6 Thesis Outline**

This thesis comprises seven chapters. The first three chapters set the scene for the main analysis. In this chapter, an introductory discussion of the relationship between *syllabus* and *curriculum* has served as the appetizer which stimulates the rest of the study. Three research questions have been launched to investigate the ELT methodologies promoted in various syllabuses. Chapter Two provides a review for the pertinent literature that focuses on three aspects: historical development of English language curriculum in Hong Kong; explanations for various curriculum changes; and English Language Teaching methodologies promoted in the syllabuses. The literature review identifies general, theoretical perceptions of each aspect that inform the study, as well as existing portrayals of the primary school curriculum in Hong Kong in general, and the English language curriculum in particular. Chapter Three outlines and justifies the research methodology and procedures that have been employed to examine the three research questions. It also provides detailed explanation of the analytical instruments that are used in the study to investigate the pedagogical features of English language syllabuses for primary schools in Hong Kong.

The next three chapters form the principal database of the study. Chapters Four to Six concentrate on individual innovations in the primary English

curriculum in different phases: 1967-75, 1976-1980; 1981-1996; and 1997 onwards, respectively. Chapter Four provides a detailed portrayal on the Oral-Structural Approach (OSA) and its manifestations on the earlier 1967 and 1976 primary English syllabuses. Chapter Five is devoted to the discussion of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1981 syllabus. Chapter Six focuses on the most recent syllabus published in 1997 and studies the extensive influence of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) English subject.

Finally, Chapter Seven draws the various intricacies together. It provides a synoptic discussion on emergent features and trends of the English language curriculum from the chronological analysis outlined in Chapters Four to Six. The findings of the study are then summarized and discussed within the wider theoretical context arising from the review of the literature in Chapter Two. Pedagogical implications and recommendation for further studies are also included.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the linkage between this study and the relevant literature and thus provides a necessary context for this research as it approaches the three predominant English Language Teaching methodologies from a general historical perspective. The scope of the review is limited to the critical discussion of research studies that drew insights towards various ELT paradigms in the English curricula for primary schools in Hong Kong. Particularly, issues pertinent to the three research questions (Section 1.4) including general philosophies, origins and pedagogies will be addressed with more emphasis.

In this chapter, section 2.2 discusses the historical development of English language education in Hong Kong since the beginning of colonial rule. Then from sections 2.3 to 2.5, an overview of three major English Language Teaching (and learning) methodologies presented by the English curricula for primary schools in Hong Kong is presented in a chronological order respectively: Oral-Structural Approach (OSA) across 1960s and 1970s; Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1980s; and the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) since the 1990s. Since TBLT is immersed in the overall curriculum framework Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC), the discussion is sustained under the broader name of the TOC initiatives in section 2.5 of this chapter. Research studies related to the three phases of the TOC are further delineated in sub-sections.



Finally, key paradigm changes of the ELT methodologies as reflected from the primary school English language curriculum in Hong Kong during the past four decades are summarized in section 2.6.

In addition, an important goal of this chapter is to clarify misconceptions (if any) of the ELT methodologies and thus, reorient readers towards discussion in the rest of the thesis.

## **2.2 Historical Development of English Language Education in Hong Kong**

The provision of English language education can be traced back to Victorian Hong Kong from 1840s onwards (Evans, 1998). The initiative to provide ELT was not formulated in a vacuum, for the Treaty of Nanjing prompted some British educational agencies to offer schooling of some kind in this tiny British land. The first Western-style school on Hong Kong Island, which was the Morrison Education Society School, opened on November 1, in 1842 (Sweeting, 1998). Its establishment also marked the launch of the English language education in Hong Kong.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a few private Anglo-Chinese mission schools were already in place for schoolchildren from wealthy families to earn elementary education and acquire the foreign tongue, English. Yet, the colonial government did not have strong initiatives to establish a common and systematic foreign language curriculum for the whole of Hong Kong. As a result, Confucian village schools and western missionary schools had to seek English curricula of their own. Policy changes regarding TEFL/TESL to primary school

pupils in Hong Kong did not emerge until governmental-initiated universal primary education in the mid-twentieth century. The colonial government's laissez faire non-intervention position (Evans, 1998) sustained until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War in China.

In the late 1940s, the population of Hong Kong expanded rapidly, owing to a large influx of refugees from Mainland China. Many school age immigrant children came, and a lot more were born of local families shortly after the Japanese occupation and World War II. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, 1950, there were 120,191 pupils enrolling in primary schools. And a steady rise of 20,000 per annum in the educational expansion was expected (Director of Education, 1950). The colonial government noticed the mounting demand on primary schooling and intense desire for foreign language education in this treaty port. Unlike its lenient practices before, the government responded to societal needs by attaching greater importance to introduce formal English language education in her colony. At last, an organization supervising the language policy was established in catering for English language education for primary pupils.

According to F.J.F. Tingay (ED, 1959), one of the editors of the *English Bulletin*, the English Sub-Committee of the Syllabuses and Textbooks Committee of the Hong Kong Education Department formulated a recommended English Syllabus for Primary Schools in 1953. This pilot syllabus was neither built on mere opinion nor on a random basis, but it was a product of the committee members who were aware of numerous research investigating non-English



speaking children learning English as a foreign language worldwide. The committee examined many available practices and models of the time, including popular foreign designs. Eventually, they built the syllabus from the *Oxford English Course (O.E.C.)*, which was initially developed for Malaya. Instead of using the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method was adopted because it taught pupils to watch, listen and respond without the burdensome translation process (Paces, 1960).

Surprisingly, this syllabus was not widely available to teachers in each primary school. Not until 1967 did the first official English syllabus for the primary schools come into substantial circulation. It then became the hallmark of the government-initiated primary English curriculum regarding the language policy in Hong Kong.

Prior to the first syllabus, the *English Bulletin*, a reputable ELT journal, was “a means of spreading information to Hong Kong teachers about methods, books and the teaching of English in general” (ED, 1959, p. 1). It provided instructional and pedagogical suggestions to English teachers in Hong Kong. In this study, the *English Bulletin* has also provided many historical insights into the understanding of the English Language Teaching methodologies in Hong Kong primary schools during earlier decades. Table 2.1 indicates the principal English Language Teaching developments from the post-war years to the present day.



**Table 2.1 A historical framework of the English Language Teaching methodologies promoted in Hong Kong primary schools: 1945-2002 (based on Cheng, 1983)**

Period	English Language Teaching methodology	Features (i.e., major textbooks, syllabuses, and curriculum guidelines)
1940s	Grammar Translation Method	a) Grammar book used—West’s <i>New Method Readers</i>
1950s	Direct Method	a) A recommended English syllabus in 1953 (but with limited circulation) b) Course book specifically written for English learning— <i>The Oxford English Course for Hong Kong</i> c) <i>The English Bulletin</i> in 1953
1960s	Oral-Structural Approach	a) Ad hoc party on primary English syllabus b) <i>Suggested syllabuses for primary schools, English</i> in 1967 *
1970s	Oral-Structural Approach	a) <i>Syllabuses for primary schools—English (Primary 1-6)</i> in 1976 * (a revised edition based on the 1973 syllabus)
1980s	Communicative Language Teaching	a) <i>Syllabuses for primary schools—English (Primary 1-6)</i> in 1981 *
1990s	Task-Based Language Teaching (i.e., Target Oriented Curriculum)	a) <i>Syllabuses for primary schools—English language (Primary 1-6)</i> in 1997 *
2000s	Key Learning Area (KLA)	a) <i>English language education KLA curriculum guide</i> in 2002

Those items marked with an asterisk \* were the key documents which formed the foci of this study. Also, several key English Language Teaching methodologies that informed the analysis of the English curriculum in this study have been summarized in the second column in Table 2.1.

### 2.3 Oral-Structural Approach in the 1960s and 1970s

The Oral-Structural Approach was the prevalent ELT methodology during

1960s and 1970s in Hong Kong. Two English syllabuses for local primary schools, which were issued in 1967 and 1976, endorsed the Oral-Structural Approach. They were effective in use for almost two decades in the English curriculum. Therefore, it was essential to examine in broad terms the general philosophies and pedagogical features as reflected in these two syllabuses.

### 2.3.1 Primary English Syllabus in 1967

In 1967, the Director of Education ordered the publication of the *Suggested Syllabuses for Primary Schools, English*. This 112-page volume presented a comprehensive course aimed for junior 2 to 6 primary school pupils learning English as a foreign language, the first of its kind in Hong Kong. Prepared by a panel of school inspectors, training college lecturers and in-service teachers of the time, the syllabus was meant to be an optional, non-mandatory reference for primary school teachers. It gave teachers guidance on teaching English items and linguistic skills; choosing textbooks, specimens of classroom phrases and pronunciation exercises; plus providing a suggested word list of 1600 headwords. Vocabulary in the word list was selected from Michael West's famous *A General Service List of English Words* published in 1953.

Since the teaching of English language started from primary two, the suggested syllabus included guidelines and materials for five consecutive years of English teaching. Regarding the English language pedagogy, the main characteristic of this syllabus was that it emphasized the acquisition of speech habits in learning a foreign language (Howe, 1967a). What's more, listening and



speaking were the basics of English learning throughout the primary course while reading and writing followed. Thus, learning was linear. Howe (1967a) constructed a vivid depiction of the routine of a lesson. The first stage was always the oral presentation of a new item. Then, the teacher acted as the model in articulating with accurate stress, rhythm and intonation patterns for pupils to familiarize them with the sound of the item. Next, pupils practiced repeating orally the sound they heard through chorus work but not chanting. It was not difficult to imagine that the Oral-Structural Approach imposed a firm and rigid control over a class of 35-40 pupils.

The syllabus also presented an interesting remark towards the perception of errors in grammar learning in that “errors mean that correct language habits have not been acquired” (ED, 1967, p. 11). Contrary to contemporary ideas in TEFL/TESL, errors were viewed as end products rather than developmental inter-language norms.

### 2.3.2 Primary English Syllabus in 1976

After the publication of the first primary English syllabus, a revised edition titled *Syllabuses for Primary Schools—English (Primary 1-6)* was finalized in 1976. The Curriculum Development Committee did the revision because there was a need to incorporate updated teaching methods as well as specify pedagogical details that had been missing since the former syllabus. Having better provision of instructional resources, English teaching was extended to primary one, and therefore, relevant guidelines were also added in this section.



In fact, the second syllabus shared a lot of similarities with the first one as if it was the extension of the previous one. Broadly speaking, the Oral-Structural Approach still ventured to be the basis of TEFL/TESL throughout the primary schools in Hong Kong. Oral proficiency and spoken forms remained the foci. English learning was viewed as acquiring its skills sequentially. That is, listening came before speaking, speaking before reading and reading before writing. Aural and oral training received the most emphases. Moreover, acquiring English was intended as a way for pupils to produce certain language habits. For instance, learning a language item such as vocabulary should be accompanied by repetitive practice, and it was the teacher's responsibility to experiment more with innovative pedagogy which suits pupils' needs. The syllabus commented that "the art of disguising the repetition to avoid monotony is the art of teaching" (CDC, 1976, p. 4). Again, a vocabulary list of 1200 headwords was included.

### 2.3.3 Relationships between the Two Syllabuses

Despite similar theoretical and pedagogical orientations, there were issues that were discussed in the 1976 syllabus but not in the previous one. One prominent example was the increasing attention given to language teaching games and activities. Increasingly, games were perceived as enjoyable and meaningful ways for primary pupils to orally express and revise language items they had already acquired (Howe, 1968). The rationale of the introduction of games was not difficult to deduce. Games were presented as a thoughtful way to enlighten and motivate pupils because "a relaxed classroom atmosphere is more conducive

to language learning than a formal one” (CDC, 1976, p. 26). Another example was the introduction of Educational Television (ETV) in Hong Kong. It served as a powerful audio-visual aid to reinforce English listening and speaking learning and supplement other daily classroom learning under the Oral-Structural Approach. As mentioned above, English was taught as early as to primary one pupils. A special section was devoted to primary one, plus a suggested word list of 167 words was appended to this level.

Overall, the two syllabuses followed a highly similar orientation in adopting the Oral-Structural Approach in teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in Hong Kong. These two syllabuses suggested an emerging viewpoint that education and English language teaching in Hong Kong were no longer only open to wealthy and brilliant children. The syllabus designed had to take into consideration school children of varying academic and linguistic aptitudes. Particularly, language games and activities suggested in the 1976 syllabus could excite interest and learning spirit of slow and weak learners. Their motivation and interest to learn could be further aroused (Willey, 1955; Howe, 1968). No wonder Etherton (1981) commented in retrospect “some years ago, it could be argued that the English syllabus was meant to be a guide for teachers facing elite children (although this was not entirely true)” (p. 12).

While the government saw the importance of providing English teaching as early as primary 1, criticisms towards the primary English syllabuses existed. For instance, Etherton (1981) asserted that “the syllabuses (and particularly the

primary one) contain too much material at each level” (p. 14). He argued that the curriculum was too crowded. He also suggested that “rather than use one syllabus which tries to cover all levels of ability, it is probably better to have no syllabus and to allow schools to work out their own schemes of work” (p. 18). Presumably, he wanted to leave teachers at the mercy of trial and error so that they could experiment to discover the optimal way to teach in a classroom. And Etherton believed the syllabus deprived the flexibility of individual schools to experiment new teaching methods. The 1976 syllabus remained effective for five years until the replacement by a new syllabus in 1981.

#### **2.4 Communicative Language Teaching from the 1980s to the Early 1990s**

K. Westcott, a representative from the British Council, once concluded that “the teaching of English in primary schools was largely ineffective and suggested axing the subject from the primary curriculum” (Cheng, 1983, p. 93). Other ELT experts and educationists had expressed similar concerns because the standard of Hong Kong pupils’ English appeared to decline. Innovations had to be sought to improve English teaching.

Mr. Ray Tongue was the key person to introduce and popularize the Communicative Language Teaching in Hong Kong (Cheng, 1983). He was appointed to the post of English Language Advisor in 1978. He was a confirmed believer in Communicative Language Teaching and under his leadership, the approach became realized in the new syllabus.

In 1981, the Curriculum Development Committee of Hong Kong published



its most long lasting in-use syllabus, *Syllabuses for primary schools—English (Primary 1-6)*. This volume advocated Communicative Language Teaching, and it gave more lucid objectives related to the language-learning situation in Hong Kong when compared with the former syllabuses.

This syllabus was issued at exactly the same time as major educational reform in Hong Kong. Compulsory education was made available to all pupils until they turned fifteen since 1979; syllabus designers then needed to adjust their mindsets, of not only producing a syllabus suitable for the elite, but also catering to schoolchildren of a wide spectrum of abilities. Therefore, on the cover page of the 1981 syllabus, five major aims in primary education were explicitly stated, namely *individual development, interpersonal relationships, academic knowledge, physical fitness* and *aesthetic appreciation*. English language curriculum, as a major component in primary education, was built to embrace and fulfil the above five aims.

Apart from changes in educational philosophy as well as policy, this syllabus was also the product in response to the important worldwide development in the theory and practice of TEFL/TESL. Meanwhile, in order to allow more room for pedagogical creativity, this syllabus started to divide English teaching and learning into two levels: lower primary (Stage 1) and upper primary (Stage 2).

Regarding the language teaching methodology, Communicative Language Teaching emphasized the importance of engaging learners in real language use for purposeful communication. Communicative activities expressed by the 1981

syllabus were principally task-oriented as “they provide ‘actual meaning’ by setting the learner tasks which require the use of language, where success and failure is judged in terms of whether or not these tasks have been successfully completed” (CDC, p. 32). Tasks promoting integrated skills were, therefore, highly recommended. Therefore, group and pair work, and new communication activity such as *crossing the information gap* (CDC, 1981) could elicit meaningful interaction between pupils, and thus promote communicative and contextualized language learning (Cheng, 1983).

In addition, the sole emphasis on grammar accuracy tended to be replaced by communicative fluency of learners, as suggested in the new syllabus. As a result, the ideas of habit formation and sequential learning of skills as suggested by earlier syllabuses were abandoned, and the statement towards errors also changed in the 1981 syllabus. The 1981 syllabus assured that “the emphasis on the importance of learner interest may be seen, then, as a means to an end” (CDC, p. 22). Clark’s (1990) comment also echoed the idea “as in all project syllabus guidelines the first concern should be with language and not with the four skills” (p. 559). Taking care of the internal needs of the learners had a revolutionary impact upon understanding of languages and the way learners acquire them.

Despite the high profile introduction of Communicative Language Teaching in this syllabus, deployment of its beliefs was not a trouble-free mission. For instance, Sze (1992) criticized that no needs analysis was conducted before the curriculum was drawn up. Also, teachers were not ready and familiar with

Communicative Language Teaching because there was not enough exemplary and other logistical support then. Etherton (1981) also reminded us that “Communicative practice in the classroom is not only by definition unrealistic, but ad hoc and tentative” (p. 17). Furthermore, other situational limitations including big class size and language teachers’ heavy workloads made it even more difficult to operationalize the genuine Communicative Language Teaching in classrooms of Hong Kong.

Apart from changing ELT beliefs and practices, revision of this syllabus was sophisticated because it involved calibration of people’s mindsets. One area of improvement that people always overlooked was the incentives of curriculum planners to build a better rapport with language teachers, by explaining to them various reasons for a curriculum change. This was an obvious political consideration by smoothing the curriculum reform from an absolute top-down mode to a somewhat friendly CDC. The 1981 syllabus stated explicitly the reasons for a syllabus change to teachers and the practicality of learning English for pupils. Greater awareness on learner’s needs and interests began to emerge. Nevertheless, Communicative Language Teaching has been sustained for more than a decade and is still a popular practice. Its influence has transcended beyond the 1981 syllabus to the Target Oriented Curriculum.

## **2.5 Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) Initiatives**

While Communicative Language Teaching was prevailing in early 1990s, the government had already begun to explore innovative approaches of TEFL/TESL.



The original idea of the TOC came from the suggestion made in the Education Commission Report No 4 (1990). As foreshadowed, the ELT methodology Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is largely immersed under the broad curriculum framework of the TOC, it will be helpful to first understand the TOC framework in general and then TBLT (Chapter Six) in particular. According to Morris (2000), the TOC (i.e., Chinese, English and mathematics curriculum) can be divided into three distinct phases in relation to various stages of curriculum development. In order to facilitate a detailed and accurate portrayal of the TOC, the same categorization is adopted in this section to examine the English language education in Hong Kong.

#### 2.5.1 First Phase: TTRA and Genesis of the TOC

The first phase refers to the period from 1991 to 1993. Four expatriate curriculum developers, J.L. Clark, A. Scarino, J. Brownell and W. Littlewood (ILE, 1994), were assigned to devise the TOC framework. In preparation, they had been looking for curriculum reforms overseas, including the UK National Curriculum and the Australian Language Levels Project. No one was entirely certain about the genesis of the TOC framework (Morris, 2000). However, it could be identified with its earlier version, Targets and Target-Related Assessment (TTRA). Apparently, the whole framework stands as a full curriculum rather than only as an assessment scheme. However, TTRA could be recognized as the prototype of the TOC, with several major modifications. The feature of a mastery-learning programme (McClelland & Stimpson, 1993) continues to shed

light on the existing TOC. Also, “in terms of pedagogy the reform was premised on a social constructivist (Vygotsky, 1978) perspective on learning” (Morris, Chan & Ling, 1998, p. 202).

TOC was not appealing when it was first introduced to the public and to English teachers. That’s why in the media “TTRA was dubbed ‘Teachers Totally Running Away’ and its successor the TOC was termed the ‘Totally Objectionable Curriculum’” (Morris et al., 1998, p. 206). The witty interpretation of the acronyms reflected a strong opposition against the TOC during the time. One reason was that “the TOC was preceded by a wave of curriculum and school reform initiatives (the Activity Approach, School-based Curriculum Tailoring, the School Management Initiative, Mastery Learning)” (Morris et al., 1998, p. 210). It was believed that the many piecemeal and changeable initiatives from the government frustrated the English language teachers.

In fact, the impetus of the TOC in English language teaching is that it makes comprehensive changes in language knowledge, pedagogy and assessment. Learning targets are also set in different stages and dimensions. The TOC advocates the integrative use of language skills and language development strategies. For example, it is not advisable to prescribe a context-free vocabulary list as potentially useful words can be numerous and language learning is regarded as a lifelong process. The pedagogy is also open to cater more diversified learning conditions. But all the improvements have been translated to mean that teachers will have a heavier workload and that efforts in the past were



unproductive. In brief, Morris (2000) has summarized “the overall emphasis in this first phase was on assessment, selection and the promotion of accountability” (p. 23). Thus, the first phase of the reform can be regarded as a politically tense one without much support from the English teaching community.

### 2.5.2 Second Phase: The TOC in Shape

Having a revised framework and more user-friendly guidelines, the TOC was first applied in primary schooling. Carless (1997) reveals that:

In September 1995, implementation of the new curriculum began in primary 1 classes in about 15% of primary schools, and according to the Education Department (1996), in the 1996-1997 school year 61% of primary and special schools are implementing the TOC or have embodied TOC characteristics in their classroom practices. (p. 351)

While the statistics can be encouraging yet erratic, examining the contents of the syllabus itself can be more revealing. The first official TOC plan was realized in 1994 with the publication of *Target Oriented Curriculum Programme of Study for English Language—Key Stage 1 (Primary 1-3)*. There are many differences between this TOC guideline and the former 1981 syllabus. Firstly, three dimensions in the TOC—the Interpersonal Dimension (ID), Knowledge Dimension (KD) and Experience Dimension (ED)—replaced the emphasis of the four macro language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing) in the 1981 syllabus. Secondly, the TOC catered to a holistic acquisition of language through Task-Based Language Teaching whereas “the previous syllabus promoted a presentation-production-practice (P-P-P) approach, which was based on a linear syllabus of linguistic items” (Tong, Adamson & Che, 2000, p. 152). More



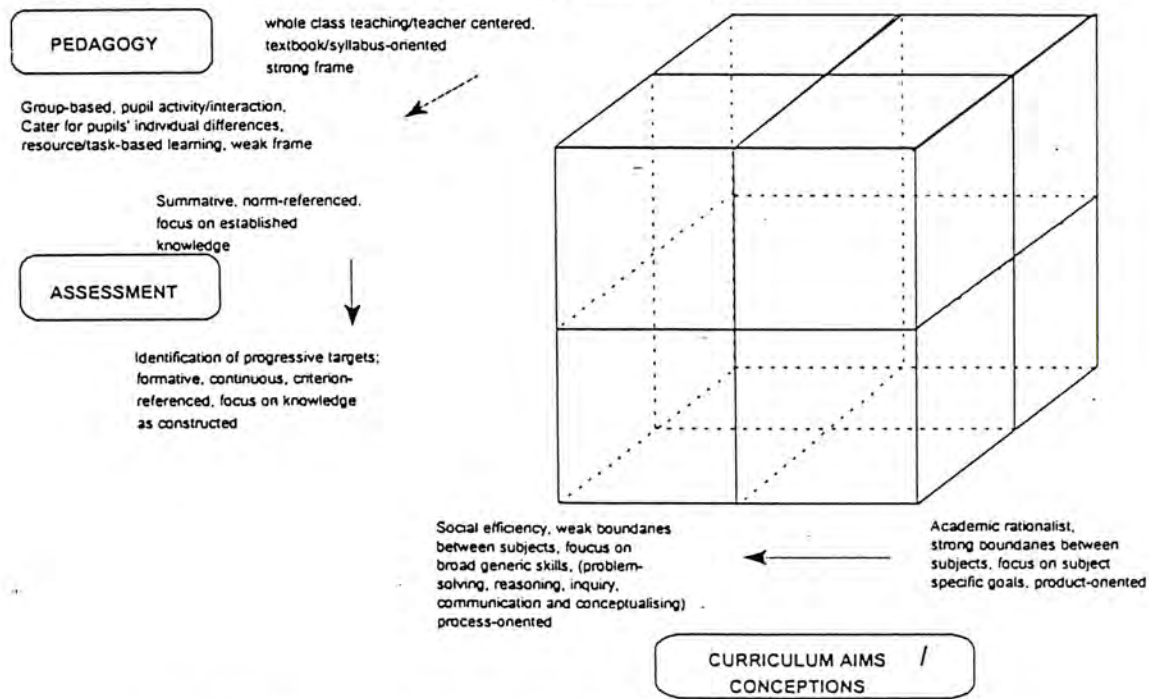
importantly, the TOC suggests a criterion-referenced assessment scheme which can induce a healthy backwash effect on eliminating the competitive examination culture. As a result, the Academic Aptitude Test for primary six pupils for secondary school places allocation was abandoned in 2000. This is particularly crucial in language policy because learning a language requires more than merely taking tests on language contents; various linguistic skills must also be cultivated. In Clark's (1990) words, "another most important function of assessment is to provide a healthy incentive for good teaching and learning" (p. 555). And the TOC seems to offer a promising direction that Hong Kong should head for in this aspect.

Although the TOC appeared to be novel to many, it has inherited many similarities from Communicative Language Teaching (Carless, 1998). One observation is the textbook adaptation to the TOC design as "tasks are seen as congruent with the goals of communicative approaches to language learning: by taking part in real or simulated situations that require them to communicate, learners, it is argued, can acquire the target language (Tong et al., 2000, pp. 147-148). Communicative orientation remains as the essence of the TOC and communicative goals still stay. Hence, the second phase can be viewed as a transitional phase to the TOC beyond 1997.

### 2.5.3 Third Phase: The TOC beyond 1997

The present English syllabus, *Syllabuses for Primary Schools—English Language (Primary 1-6)*, was issued in the year of the handover of Hong Kong

Special Administrative Region to the People’s Republic of China in 1997. As described by Morris et al. (1996), the TOC is “the most significant landmark in curriculum reform in Hong Kong since the second world war, given that it attempts to change the three key 'message systems,' namely the nature of knowledge/schooling, pedagogy and assessment” (Carless, 1999, p. 239; cf. Morris et al., 1996). It is an undeniable fact that the TOC involves fundamental changes to the nature of the primary school curriculum across three core subjects, Chinese, English and mathematics. Figure 2.2 summarizes the three message systems that experience changes, namely aims, pedagogy and assessment.



(The arrows indicate the shifts promoted by the TOC)

**Figure 2.1     The TOC: Key dimensions of the reform**  
 (Source: Morris et al., 1996, p. 46.)

Essentially, the present TOC framework suggests English language teaching is more of a language rather than a subject. The syllabus discusses more about the



language itself and is less content focused. This change matches the overall philosophical modification in the TOC era (Day, 2001). Having revisited the major Greek and Roman education models, Day (2001) has suggested that “an excellent P4-S3 curriculum which eliminates the content based baggage of the present curriculum could be built” (p. 70). He suggests that a thematic curriculum with portfolio assessment similar to that of the TOC should be in place.

A number of studies have been conducted since the official introduction of the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) initiatives in 1995. Major themes are managing curriculum reform (Carless, 1997; Chan, 1998; Morris, 1995; & Morris et al., 1998); teachers’ professional development (Ling, 1998); cultural appropriacy (Carless, 1999); criterion-referenced assessment scheme (Clark, 1990); and many others. While studies concerning the logistical and pragmatic aspects of the TOC are available in studies above and elsewhere, this study focuses to explore the theoretical facets of TBLT within the TOC framework. As noted from the two phases above, the idea of the TOC has not been formulated in a vacuum. There is a theoretical basis in foreign/second language learning in which the framework of the TOC and specifically, TBLT rely on. Issues of the TOC and TBLT will be further discussed in Chapter Six. Quoting Carless’s (1998) words, “in summary, TOC is a curriculum initiative which integrates teaching, learning and assessment in a recursive manner” (p. 356).

Today, the TOC remains as the most influential and controversial curriculum reform ever in the history of English language curriculum in Hong Kong.

## 2.6 Summary of Chapter Two

As the four primary English syllabuses for primary schools suggest, there has been considerable progress in terms of language curriculum development and English Language Teaching methodologies promoted in Hong Kong. Let's briefly recap what has been covered in this chapter.

This literature review has provided a historical account of the English Language Teaching methodologies and their transitions predominant in the four English syllabuses for primary schools of Hong Kong. Three paradigms of English language teaching were identified and their transitions were discussed briefly. They are the Oral-Structural Approach, Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching. Each has its own unique principles and contributions to the teaching of English as a foreign/second language in Hong Kong.

The Oral-Structural Approach was maintained throughout the 1960s and 1970s by two official syllabuses. Spoken proficiency and forms were the basis of ELT.

Communicative Language Teaching took over the Oral-Structural Approach since 1981, when the third syllabus was issued. It valued purposeful communication higher in the language learning process than the acquisition of language products—forms.

Lastly, the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) still claims to be effective in the status quo. Formally, the TOC is an overall curriculum framework, for TBLT



is not regarded as merely one 'pure' approach. Instead, the TOC can be considered a composite language curriculum integrating different methods, techniques and approaches. Although strong opposition appeared at the initial stage of implementation, the TOC is regarded as the Renaissance of English language curriculum of Hong Kong.

Having introduced the three key ELT methodologies, Chapter Three will outline the methodological procedures that facilitate thorough discussion of the Hong Kong context.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

As foreshadowed in Chapter One, the distinction between syllabus and curriculum is often less clear-cut than it may at first appear. Generally, curriculum is more comprehensive than a syllabus since a syllabus only specifies the list of content to be taught (Morris, 1996). However, unlike conventional practice, “the ‘syllabuses’ produced by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) are also more than this as they provide a statement of aims and objectives, and recommended teaching and assessment methods” (Morris, 1996, p. 2). As curriculum artefacts, English language syllabuses reflect the planned curricula as well as the educational beliefs of Hong Kong. In the primary English syllabus (1981), for example, it stated that “every syllabus in every subject is based on a set of assumptions or axioms about what is to be taught and how that content is most efficiently learnt by students” (p. 7). The present study is, therefore, an analysis of the planned English curriculum of Hong Kong primary schools, focusing on the officially-issued syllabuses.

The goal of this research is threefold. First, it aims to identify major English Language Teaching methodologies that are promoted in the primary English syllabuses (RQ 1). Second, it critically analyzes the underlying theoretical assumptions and pedagogical features that characterize the ELT methodologies (RQ 2). Third, it endeavors to explore the relation between ELT methodologies



and syllabus design (RQ 3).

Given that curriculum development is a continuing process, and in order to attain a holistic view of the English Language Teaching in Hong Kong primary schools, a historical comparative perspective is adopted to trace the history of the planned English curriculum. This perspective can enable teachers and curriculum planners with a retrospective vision of English teaching and learning in Hong Kong. It also promotes a coherent understanding of the process and nature of curriculum change. In addition, a historical perspective allows the study to reflect and identify the emergent trends of shifts (Adamson, 1998) in the English curriculum of Hong Kong.

This study analyzes the English curriculum regarding the objectives, contents and pedagogical approaches to English teaching and learning. The principal evidence is the documentary analysis of the various syllabuses. Interviews with personnel from different domains will also be adopted to gain an insight of different roles played by different agencies, including the Curriculum Development Council, which is the major curriculum development section of the Education Department in Hong Kong; academics personnel in applied linguistics and ELT; and in-service primary teachers of English.

In all, Chapter Three describes how the research was designed and justifies the research methodology adopted. The next section refines the scope of this study so as to avoid vagueness. Section 3.3 further elaborates on the nature of research and justifies the methodology selected. Later sections devote to the

discussion of analytical framework and data collection procedures.

### **3.2 Focus of the Study**

Prior to the discussion of research methodology, the scope of the study has to be refined. The present study primarily comprises the critical analysis of the English syllabuses of Hong Kong primary schools. It is descriptive and interpretative in nature. Yet, it is common to expect an evaluative dimension which may be injected in this study as if in other curriculum analysis research. According to Brown's (1989; 1995), an evaluation is "the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of a curriculum and assess its effectiveness within the context of the particular institutions involved" (1989, p. 223; 1995, p. 218). He further argues that the implementation of evaluation could involve both qualitative and quantitative data. The procedures can be "interviews, case studies, classroom observations, meetings, diaries, or even conversation over coffee" (Brown, 1995, p. 219). Nevertheless, a comprehensive curriculum evaluation can take years and lots of manpower to administrate. Hence, the evaluative intention is largely abandoned here.

Owing to time and resource constraints, the scope of the present study is confined to address theoretically-motivated and pedagogical changes as presented in the four key volumes of English syllabuses for Hong Kong primary schools. It seeks to analyze the intended or manifest curriculum (Morris, 1996). The government-initiated syllabuses cover a time span of four decades, and they



comprise the primary sources in this study. To be precise, the critical analysis of the primary English curriculum constitutes the focus of this study. In addition, ethnographic techniques such as interviews and consultation of newspaper databases were used to understand and interpret the changing ELT curriculum phenomena.

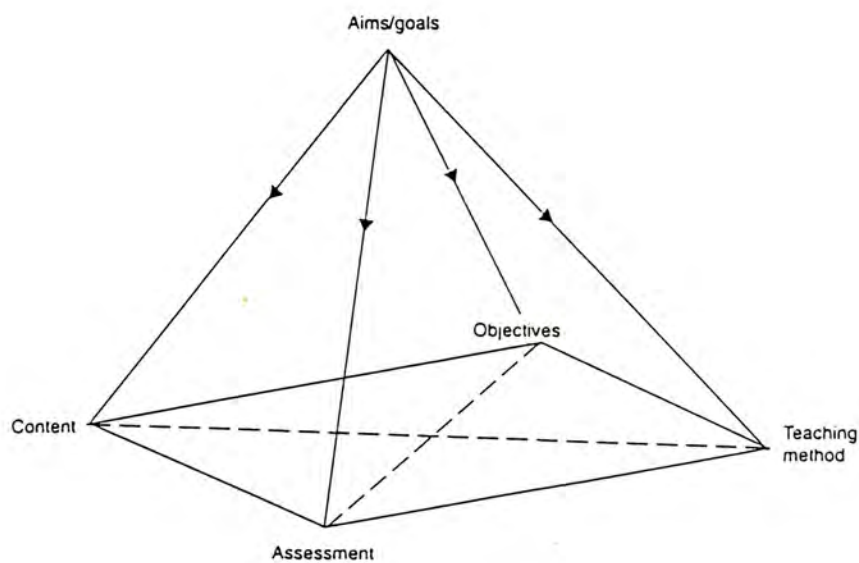
**3.3 Nature of the Research**

The nature of this research essentially centres around the basic components in the study of the curriculum. Morris (1996) delineates the study of curriculum by addressing the following questions:

1. What are its intentions?
  2. What is the content?
  3. What methods are used to deliver it?
  4. How is it assessed?

**Figure 3.1     The basic components in the study of curriculum (based on Morris, 1996)**

These questions are closely related to the intentions (aims/goals, objectives), content, teaching methods and assessment of a curriculum. Figure 3.2 is a pyramid which shows the components of a curriculum.



**Figure 3.2     The components of a curriculum (Source: Morris, 1996, p. 4)**

These two figures provide insights to the general sketch for this study, as they contain the key foci of any curriculum, including language curriculum. They give an organization of broad themes and categories for further analysis (section 3.5). Technical, social and pragmatic aspects are beyond the scope of the current study, and they are already available elsewhere.

As the present study displays a historical interest in curriculum change, it is concerned with what the government thought was a theoretically sound way to prescribe for teachers to teach English, and therefore, a *normative perspective* has been injected. “A normative perspective is concerned with what should happen in schools, while a positivist perspective is concerned with what actually does happen in schools” (Morris, 1996, p. 6). This normative perspective often realizes itself in the syllabuses and therefore, it provides a justification of why this



study is geared towards a theoretical orientation.

### **3.4 Procedures of Data Collection**

Data were collected for the study during the academic year 2001-2002. Firstly, syllabuses and related curriculum documents were collected from the CDC and local libraries. Secondly, important interviewees were identified and contacted in order to get first-hand data from people who played various roles in English language curriculum development. The procedures of collecting syllabuses and conducting interviews are presented in the following sections.

#### **3.4.1 Syllabuses**

The study analyzes the English language curriculum of Hong Kong primary schools associated with each of the phases in terms of its objectives, contents and pedagogical approaches to ELT. Each phase was marked by the publication of new syllabuses that differ in the above three criteria. In sum, four key English syllabuses for Hong Kong primary schools were collected. They were issued by the government officially in years 1967, 1976, 1981 and 1997. The English language syllabuses are the official master plans of what the English curricula wanted to achieve in Hong Kong. These policy documents and other core curriculum guidelines of the English language shed light on the pedagogical beliefs and intended practices in ELT. Thus, they served as the primary source of the documentary analysis.

#### **3.4.2 Interviews**

Similar to the syllabuses issued by the government, interview data were also

an important source secondary to syllabuses in this study. Interviews can supplement written information published on the syllabuses. It is fruitful to gather insights from different parties so as to give a comprehensive picture of the contexts of the syllabus. Triangulation of informants is adopted to prevent bias in the selection of informants.

In order to allow flexibility in this interpretative study, semi-structured interviews were used to yield insights beyond printed materials. There was a pre-programmed set of questions (see Appendix II) as a checklist to assure all important issues related to the foci of the research questions were raised. Additional questions were also initiated in response to the expertise of the informant during the course of the interview. Semi-structured interviews also provide a more in-depth inquiry into the subject matter (McFee, 1992).

In sum, seven interviews have been conducted. By purposive sampling (McFee, 1992), the researcher could deliberately choose people from different domains so as to gather complementary views. The audio recordings of the interviews were translated and transcribed for analysis. The interview data was digitalized and burnt into seven CDs for enhanced archiving (Appendix VII). A profile of interviewees was tabulated to record the demographic information of the interviewees (see Appendix III). Full report of a sample interview transcript was also available in the appendix (Appendices IV, V, VI) for detailed reference.

#### *3.4.3 Triangulation of Data*

Apart from syllabuses and interviews, there were other inputs of data from



different domains of sources. Triangulation of data was employed to safeguard the impartiality (McFee, 1992). The sources of data are summarized in the table below:

Domains	Sources/Methods
1. Academic community	Semi-structured interviews with Education Department Curriculum Development Officers (English Section) [ <i>officials</i> ], professors [ <i>advisors</i> ] & primary teachers [ <i>implementers</i> ]
2. Society	newspaper coverage, textbooks, <i>The English Bulletin</i> , etc.
3. Government	official syllabuses, consultation documents, <i>Director of Education Annual Report</i> , <i>Education Commission Report</i> , <i>Education Department Annual Summary</i> , etc.

**Figure 3.3      Triangulation of data collection**

### 3.5 Analytical Framework

Because the present study is intended to be descriptive and interpretative, it is essential to build an analytical framework to facilitate a fair and thorough study. According to Posner (1995),

A curriculum analysis is an attempt to tease a curriculum apart into its component parts, to examine those parts and the way they fit together to make a whole, to identify the beliefs and ideas to which the developers were committed and which either explicitly or implicitly shaped the curriculum, and to examine the implications of these commitments and beliefs for the quality of the educational experience. (p. 13)

An analytical framework of curriculum analysis was adopted in order to

conduct a comprehensive analysis of the English syllabuses. However, the focus is on the basic components (Morris, 1996) related to the language curriculum. In fact, there are abundant models and frameworks of analysis of language curriculum. One model has, to date, dominated curriculum work and it was a protocol from Tyler Ralph in his famous book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Tyler, 1950). He constructed the so-called Tyler Rationale listing four procedural questions of any curriculum (see Figure 3.4). Also, “the CDC syllabuses follow the Tyler (1950) approach to curriculum planning and identify the subjects: aims and objectives, subject content, teaching methods and assessment procedures” (Morris, 1992, p. 6). Although it was designed to tackle curriculum studies in general, it lent important insights for later models including Johnson (1977). Technically, Mauritz Johnson’s conceptual model was advantageous over the Tyler Rationale not only because it was relatively more recent, but it was also specifically developed for analysis of language curriculum and therefore suited the present analysis well. Another consideration was that this study deals with historical discovery; a more well-established framework was indispensable to accommodate differences in terms of unlike syllabus design over time. For the purpose of this study, the classic framework of Johnson (1977) was employed for analysis of the English syllabuses for Hong Kong primary schools.



Johnson (1977)	Tyler (1950)
a) Goal setting b) Curriculum selection c) Curriculum structuring d) Instructional planning e) Technical Evaluation	a) What educational purposes? b) What educational experiences? c) How organize educational experience? d) How determine whether purposes attained?

**Figure 3.4      Comparison of Johnson and Tyler models (Source: Posner, 1995, p. 20)**

The Tyler Rationale and Johnson model are particularly suitable for curriculum analysis even though they are old. For consistency, the entire analysis is based on Johnson’s (1977) notion and definition of curriculum. *Goal setting* means specifying the targets and analyzing the needs of the pupils. *Curriculum selection* refers to the linguistic materials to be covered as well as the language skills to be acquired. *Curriculum structuring* concerns how the content is structured. *Instructional planning* refers to the choice of pedagogy and instructional activities after the curriculum items have been selected and structured. Finally, *technical evaluation* means to evaluate how the targets are attained. As a whole, these five criteria provided an analytical framework of the English language syllabuses of the time.

### 3.6 Methods of Data Analysis

Both primary and secondary data were collected for analysis. Published research literatures (both local and overseas) concerning second and foreign language learning dated from 1960s to the present were traced in order to compare



their influences on English syllabuses. The researcher was required to probe beneath the surface of the syllabuses and curriculum documents in order to identify their meanings. Then, the researcher utilized comparison and contrast techniques to identify patterns, regularities and peculiarities in the discussion. The results are presented in following chapters with each chapter devoted to a specific period and English Language Teaching methodology.

### **3.7 Data Reliability**

As noted above, the qualitative nature of this study entails analytical judgement and systematic comparison. To ensure the reliability of findings, various procedures were applied. For the research into the processes of curriculum development, triangulation was used to bring together evidence from interviews with key interviewees and published documents. Furthermore, any discrepancies which occurred (such as the details of the syllabus or precise dates of publications) were resolved by reliance on contemporary documents, if available, rather than on recollected accounts (Adamson, 1998).

### **3.8 Limitation**

A disclaimer has to be stated here. Since the analysis covered ground within a time span of forty years, the researcher was unable to obtain interview data regarding the syllabuses from the 1960s to 1980s. One formal resolution of this was to rely heavily on the published literature, namely the *English Bulletin*, during the time to complement the insights from semi-structured interviews.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ORAL-STRUCTURAL APPROACH

#### 4.1 Introduction

The Oral-Structural Approach (OSA) is the principal grammar-based English Language Teaching methodology revealed in the 1967 and 1976 primary English syllabuses. As this approach represents a key epoch in the fields of language teaching and curriculum design, it is of both historical and theoretical interest to pursue a systematic analysis in this chapter.

To begin, section 4.2 examines the common historical background and reasons for the issues of 1967 and 1976 syllabuses. Section 4.3 traces the origins and theoretical underpinnings of the OSA. Section 4.4 focuses on the general characteristics of the OSA patented in the primary English syllabuses of Hong Kong. Section 4.5 provides an analysis of the pedagogical features of the structural syllabuses by using the analytical framework of Johnson (1977). Section 4.6 examines the OSA adaptation in Hong Kong and highlights certain misconceptions towards the OSA. Section 4.7 synthesizes insights and attempts to draw a relation between the structural syllabus and OSA. Section 4.8 lists several limitations of the Oral-Structural Approach. Section 4.9 concludes the whole chapter by summarizing major developments of the Oral-Structural Approach.

#### 4.2 Rationale for Introducing the Oral-Structural Approach

In the early 1960s, it was not unusual to read criticisms like this in *The*



*English Bulletin*: “English still tends to be regarded in many primary schools in Hong Kong more as a subject for academic study than as material for use” (Heaton, 1963, p. 8). This criticism epitomized one of the many concerns over how English should be taught in primary schools. Presumably, it was believed that the grammar-translation approach and the direct approach, which were established language teaching methodologies then, failed to achieve what Hong Kong desired.

In March 1968, the number of primary pupils enrolled in primary schools was 666,834 (ED, 1968). The population demanding basic English education was enormous. Offering more English education was a vital political decision, illustrating the prompt responses from the government to the changing educational needs of the society.

As the concern sparked off more and more discussions associated with ELT, experts sought other theoretically-motivated ideas in the English curriculum, and at last, an innovative approach came into sight: the Oral-Structural Approach. It departed from its predecessors, the traditional grammar-translation and direct approach, in the way that the Oral-Structural Approach no longer merely focused on grammar and written forms, but it tended to place more emphasis on speech and conversations in TEFL/TESL.

The Oral-Structural Approach was pedagogically more sound than traditional language teaching methodologies, and the colonial government of Hong Kong firstly introduced the OSA to Hong Kong in 1967 in the first official syllabus of

English for primary schools: The *Suggested English Syllabus for Junior 2-6* (1967). This document represented a monolithic movement in terms of its first initiative to provide a core and common curriculum for the primary schools of Hong Kong. In addition, it incorporated the latest theoretical and practical knowledge available in ELT.

Similar to the 1967 syllabus, the *Syllabuses for Primary Schools, English (Primary 1-6)* issued in 1976 was an extension to the former syllabus published ten years earlier. They shared a great deal of common beliefs and practices concerning the Oral-Structural Approach. Thus, in this chapter, the theoretical and pedagogical facets of the Oral-Structural Approach expressed in the two syllabuses are discussed.

### **4.3 Theoretical Basis of the Oral-Structural Approach**

The Oral-Structural Approach differed from earlier traditions of language teaching in many ways. It is therefore essential to trace the antecedents and key scholars in the development of OSA both inside and outside the language teaching tradition. Also, it is best to take cognizance of language and language teaching in order to extract the essence of OSA.

#### **4.3.1 Genesis of the Oral-Structural Approach**

The original idea of the Oral-Structural Approach, also commonly called the oral approach, began to appear in the 1920s and 1930s, and its impact lasted for subsequent decades. Harold Palmer and A.S. Hornby were two of the most influential scholars in British twentieth-century language teaching. They



attempted to develop a more scientific foundation for an oral approach to teaching English (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Palmer and other scholars including Michael West considered vocabulary as the most vital aspect in foreign language learning because of the emphasis on reading skill. West published *A General Service List of English Words* in 1953, which was a comprehensive reference guide in developing vocabulary teaching materials. As a result, the selection of vocabulary became an inherent part to a language curriculum design.

Besides vocabulary, grammar also formed one of the foci in the Oral-Structural Approach. Unlike viewing grammar as an abstract logical system in the grammar-translation method, Palmer, Hornby and other British applied linguists “analyzed English and classified its major grammatical structures into sentence patterns, which could be used to help internalize the rules of English sentence structure” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 38).

With the dual foci on lexical and grammatical aspects, a comprehensive language teaching methodology—the Oral-Structural Approach was established.

#### 4.3.2 Theory of Language

At the level of theory of language, the OSA could be characterized as a type of British “structuralism” in which speech was considered as the basis of language, and structure was regarded as the heart of speaking ability (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Apart from British linguists’ inputs, American linguists including Charles C. Fries, also proposed a similar theory of language when they analyzed the structure

of English. Fries' Oral Approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language was remarkable because it suggested "what forms to teach in order to convey meaning — that is, in order to communicate — in the English language" (Hok, 1981, p. 60). Oral training, thus became an indispensable part to English language learning.

#### 4.3.3 Theory of Language Learning

Parallel to the development in psychology, the Oral-Structural Approach was compatible with the behaviourist habit-forming learning theory as "it addresses primarily the processes rather than the conditions of learning" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 40-41). Theory of language learning of the OSA was modeled as if it resembled any other kinds of skill and habit formations.

Also, the Oral-Structural Approach adopted an inductive approach to the teaching of grammar. The meaning of words and structures were not directly explained in either the target language or the mother tongue of learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Learners had to induce the grammatical features by focusing on the context clues and the learning situation. This idea also generated insights for subsequent framework of the OSA and the syllabuses issued to Hong Kong.

#### 4.4 Oral-Structural Approach Manifested in Hong Kong

The Oral-Structural Approach was adopted in Hong Kong and it displayed certain characteristics. This section examines the characteristics of the OSA made by interpretations of *The English Bulletin* and two primary English syllabuses. Their elucidations helped to shape the OSA manifested in Hong Kong. In



particular, *The English Bulletin* exemplified the Oral-Structural Approach in great detail. Similar to the previous section, the following descriptions were based on understanding of the nature of language, and language teaching and learning at that time. The five basic assumptions of the Oral-Structural Approach with regard to language teaching are as follows:

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Language is speech</li><li>2. Language is a skill</li><li>3. Language is patterned</li><li>4. Language is complex</li><li>5. Every language is unique</li></ol> |
|--|

**Figure 4.1** Five basic assumptions of the Oral-Structural Approach  
(Sources: Howe, 1966, pp. 14-17; Howe, 1967a, pp. 3-4)

First, *language is speech*. Since it was believed that spoken language came before the written language in acquiring our mother tongue, the idea carried over into the OSA as “spoken practice should precede the written work” (Howe, 1966, p. 14).

Second, *language is a skill*. And it had to be formed by habits with conscious mental and physical effort. Language learning had a behaviourist association that “practice is the only way to acquire a skill” (Howe, 1966, p. 15). Thus, English learning was perceived as “the acquisition of speech habits. By hearing and reproducing spoken English in a relevant, meaningful situation a child learned first to speak English and only later to read and write it” (Howe, 1967a, p. 3). As a result, errors were viewed as unsuccessful signs of language learning and were to be avoided at all costs.

Third, *language is patterned*. Semantically, there are two levels of meaning: lexical meaning and grammatical meaning. Teaching grammar, namely the word order of English, could equip pupils with the structure of the target language. "A useful grammar lesson is one that gives practice in using patterns until their use has become habitual" (Howe, 1966, p. 15). Following this logic, it was particularly important because the grammatical knowledge could be programmed readily at early stages of language learning.

Fourth, *language is complex*. This assumption is the extension of the third one as language is viewed as a sophisticated system. "There is no logical answer, for language is based not so much on logic as on custom and convention" (Howe, 1966, p. 16). The intention of the Oral-Structural Approach was to produce genuine language habits and language use allowing pupils to naturally pick up the rules rather than letting pupils learn inadequate grammar rules explicitly (Howe, 1967a, p. 4). However, some schools continued teaching grammar rules overtly.

Fifth, *every language is unique*. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis holds that the interference between the target language and mother tongue can predict the difficulty of foreign language learning, say Cantonese learners of English. Similarly, pitfalls of grammar-translation surface in the sense that not every language has its equivalence in another language, namely vocabulary. "Translation is equally ineffective in mastering the grammar of a language since every language is structured differently" (Howe, 1966, p. 17). Therefore, the use of translation and Cantonese in English teaching has remained an ineffective



method.

These five assumptions of the OSA supplemented understanding of theory of language and theory of foreign language teaching and learning by considering the educational environment of Hong Kong. Apart from Howe's insights, other applied linguists also participated in the discussion of the Oral-Structural Approach. For instance, the order and presentation of teaching materials and vocabulary throughout the primary course must be in chronological order as listening and understanding, speaking, reading and finally, writing. This sequence was to be maintained throughout the greater part of primary school (Howe, 1967). The rationale of a linear approach to English learning was to inculcate hearing habits (Westcott, 1976) followed by abilities to learn and write in the new language. Therefore, in order to facilitate this, Westcott (1976) asserted more than once to remind teachers to speak English at natural speed with normal stress, rhythm and intonation contours. No matter how good the textbook was, it could not convey intonation through the medium of the printed page. As a result, the verbal input from the teachers was thus vital in the Oral-Structural Approach. On the teachers' part, it had become a challenging as well as formidable task owing to big class size and limited class time.

In addition to the philosophy and theoretical assumptions underlying the Oral-Structural Approach, the pedagogical features arising from the two syllabuses tailored for ELT in Hong Kong are presented in the following section.

#### 4.5 Analysis of Pedagogical features

A language syllabus not only provides general ideas of the approach suggested, it also includes specific guidelines of what and how English should be taught. Throughout this study, the analysis of pedagogical features has been based on the analytical framework of Johnson (1977) to examine the language curriculum. The following questions are addressed: What were the goals and objectives of the syllabuses? What was the content that pupils were expected to learn? What was the organization of teaching materials like? What were the teaching methods and learning activities employed in the structural syllabus? What kind of assessment procedure was adopted? Both strengths and limitations of the pedagogical features of the primary English syllabuses have been examined.

##### 4.5.1 Goal Setting

In 1967, the first English syllabus was recommended for use firstly by all government primary schools and secondarily by other primary schools. Under the heading of "Aims of First Five Years of English Teaching," three major aims were identified: *oral proficiency*, *minimum literacy*, and *development of ability to learn through English*. These aims were self-explanatory. Interestingly, a more general goal revealed in the introduction of the syllabus stated: "the aim is to produce language habits, first in speech and later in writing" (ED, p. 2). Pupils were expected to acquire the four fundamental skills, albeit "listening and speaking should be the basis of language learning throughout the primary school" (ED, p.



2), with regular revision so as to build up their English competence to learn in the medium of English in upper forms.

The 1976 syllabus repeated exactly the same guidelines as the 1967 syllabus regarding what the syllabus aimed to achieve. It was apparent that the achievement to be expected would be the development of an oral proficiency. All skills were stressed but priority was given to the oral and aural skills in the elementary stage of English learning. That is to say, “listening and speaking should be the basis of language learning throughout the primary school” (CDC, 1976, p. 3).

These two syllabuses gave very brief guidelines on objectives. They provided linguistic and pedagogical expectations linked to learners’ needs. Yet, no reference had been made concerning the roles English should play according to the social-political environment of Hong Kong.

#### 4.5.2 Curriculum Selection

In general, it is difficult to explicitly envisage from these two syllabuses what to teach. Moreover, it would likely be exhaustive and unrealistic to list all possible teaching materials in the structural syllabus:

Instead a limited number of sentence patterns and vocabulary items should be taught orally in such a way that all pupils are able to produce the items in appropriate situations without hesitation and with reasonably accurate and pronunciation, stress and rhythm, and intonation. (ED, 1967, pp. 2-3; CDC, 1976, p. 3)

As a consequence, the first syllabus prescribed a compilation of different specimens, including classroom phrases for teachers and pupils to familiarize

themselves with; daily conversation phrases; short pronunciation exercises on vowels and consonants; and language structure on different grades of primary school; a suggested word list of 1600 headwords from all parts of speech. Examples were articles, prepositions, adjectival comparisons, tenses and vocabulary. All these gave discrete linguistic items for learners to learn and again, oral practice was essential.

The syllabuses also specified that the quantity of teaching content for primary pupils in a single lesson should not be overloaded: “one new sentence pattern or four or five new words in one lesson is ample and even then constant revision will be necessary” (ED, 1967, p. 3; CDC, 1976, p. 3).

Unlike the previous syllabus, the 1976 syllabus encouraged language teaching games and activities. They were perceived as enjoyable ways for learners to engage in meaningful interaction. The syllabus writers also justified language teaching games as “the most effective means of providing the final stage in the oral presentation of a new item as well as a very useful form of revision of items previously taught” (CDC, 1976, p. 12). Games did not only provide both an innovative and enlightening way to conduct language contents to be taught, but also they were essential parts of a language class.

#### 4.5.3 Curriculum Structuring

Both syllabuses gave identical guidelines in terms of the organizational schema: “while the suggestions are conveniently given under various headings, it should be stressed that they are not separate subjects in English but should rather



be regarded as various aspects of English teaching which must be closely integrated” (ED,1967, p. 2; CDC, 1976, p. 1). Coherence was stressed in language learning as a whole rather than the analytical learning of its language parts, as was the case in the grammar-translation method.

In both syllabuses, the teaching items were approached from easy to difficult, simple to complex, in a variety of purposeful activities. Instances are learning tenses of verbs in their present forms and later the past tense forms. While the activities might take many variant forms, there was a neat motto for teachers to be familiar with, that is, “the art of disguising the repetition to avoid monotony is the art of teaching” (1967, p. 4).

As suggested above, learning was in a sequential order. That’s why both syllabuses suggested teaching new items before reading, with reading followed by writing. The first stage was always the oral presentation of linguistic items or vocabulary to the class. Overall, the organization pattern of teaching contents was basically from simple to sophisticated, easy to difficult.

#### 4.5.4 Instructional Planning

In this part, the syllabuses had focused on how linguistic items or skills could be taught and what techniques or learning activities could be used to promote “learnability”. Under the Oral-Structural Approach, for instance, there were two steps in the teaching of reading. One was *reading readiness* and the other *phonics*. “Reading readiness in Hong Kong is largely an oral process: pupils should not begin reading until they are able to use in speech and meaningful

situations a useful range of sentence patterns and vocabulary” (ED, 1967, p. 4). Furthermore, “reading is an analytic process: we recognize whole units first and then look more closely at the parts if necessary” (ED, 1967, pp. 4-5). ‘Look and Say’ activities formed the basis to master reading skills and promote comprehension.

For writing, *kinaesthetic* methods were used. Handwriting, dictation and free composition were means for primary pupils to learn English.

Habit formation was the main strategy to nurture language learning. It was believed that the behaviourist idea in the 1960s had an influential effect on L1 as well as L2 learning. In this case, English as a foreign language in Hong Kong was introduced to pupils that way.

#### 4.5.5 Technical Evaluation

The two syllabuses gave meagre guidelines on instructional assessment. For example, informal tests were desired, but there were no further illustrations as how informal test could be executed: “Informal and occasional formal tests on all aspects of English are obviously necessary, the emphasis being on the former” (ED, 1967, p. 13).

According to the 1967 syllabus, “it must, however, be clearly recognized that the purpose of testing is to provide the teacher with information as to pupils’ progress and weaknesses to enable future lessons to be planned” (ED, 1967, p. 13). One final comment can be made here. That is, not too many tests should be administered to deter the motivation of pupils.



#### **4.6 Discussion of the Hong Kong Adaptation of the OSA**

In the grammar-translation approach, the teaching of grammar aimed to build up some explicit and generalized rules for learners to remember the structure of the language. In contrast, the Oral-Structural Approach favoured the behaviourist traditions by guiding pupils to form the correct usage habits, particularly in the aural and oral skills. The OSA thus had the merit of the traditional grammar approach in this regard, providing more oral practice, more spoken language production.

Also, the perception towards errors is worth highlighting because “errors mean that correct language habits have not been acquired” (ED, 1967, p. 11). This thought is compatible with the behaviourist language learning theory.

When the Oral-Structural Approach first was presented, there were indeed misconceptions about it; to clarify these misconceptions, it is crucial to provide further explanation concerning the Oral-Structural Approach to foreign language teaching. Hence, let’s give some additional comments of what the Oral-Structural Approach should NOT be.

First, oral work was not to replace written work. But to develop speaking and listening skills, pupils should receive training prior to reading and writing skills. Language items such as short phrases and vocabulary should be introduced as an oral preparation at each English lesson in advance of the skills of reading and writing were acquired. As a result, the idea of sequential learning prevailed in the approach.

Second, although spoken skill was stressed, it did not mean that reading and writing were ignored. Instead, “the ability to read and write English within the range of vocabulary and language structure prescribed by the syllabus is obviously of paramount importance” (Howe, 1967a, p. 8). As a result, having an analysis over the syllabuses is important not only because it helps to get rid of preoccupied and wrong ideas about the approach, but also it helps clarify the philosophy of the Oral-Structural Approach. Negative definition serves this purpose well in this case.

#### **4.7 Syllabus and the Oral-Structural Approach**

As mentioned above, the 1967 and 1976 syllabuses were highly similar in the beliefs and the recommended practices in TEFL/TESL. Boozer (1980) acknowledged that “when designing a syllabus, one should be sure about ‘what precisely constitutes’ the approach to be used” (Boozer, 1980, p. 65). Although syllabuses are reference documents, these two English language syllabuses have suggested the main direction of English language teaching in Hong Kong.

Basic to the Oral-Structural Approach is a structural syllabus and word list. “A structural syllabus is a list of the basic structures and sentence patterns of English, arranged according to their order of presentation” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 42). This argument holds for the two syllabuses because by and large, they listed structures from indefinite articles, simple imperatives to plural pronouns. The OSA promoted the idea that language skills could be approached through structures. As a result, the grammar-based 1967 and 1976 primary



English syllabuses were basically an assortment of structures and lexical items.

#### **4.8 Limitations of the OSA**

This section offers extra discussion on the limitations of the OSA for it has been the foremost English Language Teaching methodology in Hong Kong for twenty years or more. There were faults that were inherited in the Oral-Structural Approach design in addition to certain implementation deficits: One notable feature was linear mastery of decontextualized items and skills. It had an underlying assumption that once listening was administered, pupils then were ready for other skills that would naturally follow, for example:

A question may occur to you, — how will I know when the pupils are ready to begin making active in speech what they have learned to understand? You will find there is no need to answer this question. Individual pupils vary in their readiness to speak, and when a pupil is ready, he will make it very clear by speaking. (Westcott, 1976, p. 11)

This idea may seem absurd and primitive in contemporary viewpoint.

The Oral-Structural Approach also presupposed verbal drills with pupils. Therefore, in a relatively big class size, teachers inevitably had to rely on chorus work in their oral practice. It had been criticized that it could readily produce chanting: “an over-loud, monotonous kind of speech in which each word is given equal stress” (Howe, 1967a, p. 6). Individual articulation could sometimes be inaudible to the teachers. In fact, solutions had been devised for choral speaking. Group pronunciation could allow the detection of individual difficulties but individual pronunciation should be given if time permits.

Overall, the Oral-Structural Approach only expressed an attitude or approach

to English teaching based on generally accepted principles at that time. Although the guidelines were just printed words on the syllabuses and they provided no guarantee about English mastery if actually implemented in classroom instruction, these ideas lent important insights concerning the intended curriculum on language policy and pedagogy.

#### **4.9 Summary**

Two curriculum artefacts, the primary English syllabuses in 1967 and 1976, formed the foci of discussion in this chapter. For more than two decades, they described and advanced the Oral-Structural Approach paradigm in the realm of English language teaching in Hong Kong. Since a syllabus has an imperative function to direct the ELT trends in Hong Kong, the impact of these two OSA syllabuses has been influential.

– The discussion in this chapter has provided insights to the three research questions. First, it has identified in detail the origins, philosophies, theoretical assumptions, and pedagogies of the Oral-Structural Approach. Second, the chapter has included a discussion of how the syllabuses have reflected ideas in the literature of second and foreign language acquisition by studying the relationship between the syllabuses and language teaching methodology. It is clear that the Oral-Structural Approach emphasized the oral and aural skills, with a linear orientation to the development of four language skills, and that it reflected a characteristic behaviourist habit-formation perspective on foreign language learning.



Moving onward past the Oral-Structural Approach, the next chapter will devote the attention to Communicative Language Teaching, another significant movement in English language teaching in Hong Kong.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

#### 5.1 Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the main English language teaching methodology revealed in the 1981 primary English syllabus. CLT also marks one of the foremost developments in the field of curriculum design. Following the previous chapter, this chapter is devoted to the discussion of various attributes of Communicative Language Teaching.

To begin, section 5.2 demonstrates reasons for the revision made to the 1981 syllabus. Then, section 5.3 identifies the origins and theoretical basis of CLT. Next, section 5.4 focuses on the characteristics of CLT manifested in the primary English syllabus of Hong Kong. Section 5.5 gives an analysis of the pedagogical features of the communicative syllabus by using the analytical framework of Johnson (1977). Section 5.6 examines CLT adaptation in Hong Kong in terms of merits and demerits. Furthermore, section 5.7 discusses some insights relevant to CLT and the 1981 syllabus. Finally, section 5.8 concludes the whole chapter by summarizing major developments of CLT.

#### 5.2 Rationale for Introducing CLT in the 1981 Syllabus

At the beginning of the 1980s, the teaching of English in Hong Kong officially entered an era of Communicative Language Teaching (and learning) when the *Syllabuses for Primary Schools, English (Primary 1-6)* was introduced in 1981. This communicative syllabus states that



communicative purposes may be of many different kinds. What is essential in all of them is that at least two parties are involved in an interaction or transaction of some kind where one party has an intention and the other party responds or reacts to this intention. (CDC, p. 5)

Communicative Language Teaching, emphasizing communication between participants, presented a new concept from the language teaching traditions as well as the prevalent Oral-Structural Approach at that time. Despite a sharp paradigm shift, the new syllabus quickly drew broad recognition in the English Learning and Teaching (ELT) field in Hong Kong.

Curriculum developers and writers within the Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) who represented the official stance of Hong Kong government on curriculum affairs introduced Communicative Language Teaching in the primary English syllabus for various reasons.

First, Communicative Language Teaching had been pioneered and gained popularity in other Asian countries, including Malaysia and Saudi Arabia since late 1970s (Etherton, 1979; Rogers, 1981). Having studied a few relevant communicative syllabuses from foreign predecessors, the CDC made a timely decision to formulate a new syllabus so as to update and upgrade the English curriculum. This act of integrating communicatively based language teaching in the new syllabus showcased the government's compliance with the worldwide belief in TEFL/TESL.

Second, the earlier syllabuses had imposed an imbalanced attention to the communicative functions and grammatical forms of the linguistic items to be acquired (CDC, 1981). There was more emphasis on spoken and written forms of

the language while communicative functions were given little importance. When introducing the 1981 syllabus, the CDC assured there was growing evidence that “meaningful use of language may be the most effective way of mastering these forms” (CDC, p. 5). As a result, curriculum designers believed that CLT would outperform traditional approaches in facilitating language learning with genuine communication. Therefore, dual foci on form and function in TEFL/TESL resulted in Communicative Language Teaching to be introduced to Hong Kong primary schools.

Apart from the availability of foreign models and changing beliefs in language teaching, the introduction of compulsory schooling in Hong Kong prompted the government to revise the English curriculum quickly. In 1979, the Hong Kong government implemented an educational policy to provide free and compulsory education for all local children under the age of fifteen or towards the end of Form 3 (Sze & Wong, 1999). Thereafter, English became a necessary subject throughout the 9-year curriculum. Because of universal English education, the government was motivated to design a coherent foreign language curriculum consistent with broad educational reform.

The paragraphs above provide only a brief summary of the academic, pedagogical and administrative reasons for the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching in the 1981 syllabus. There are, however, other justifications for the revision of English syllabus (cf. CDC, 1981 for comprehensive review). In the next section, the genesis and theoretical assumptions underlying



Communicative Language Teaching are presented.

### **5.3 Theoretical basis of Communicative Language Teaching**

Communicative Language Teaching differs from earlier traditions of language teaching in terms of the cognizance of language and language learning. It is, therefore, essential to trace antecedents and key scholars in the construction and advocacy of CLT both inside and outside the language teaching tradition per se.

#### **5.3.1 Genesis of Communicative Language Teaching**

Dating from the late 1960s, British applied linguists have argued that some language teaching traditions and approaches, namely, the grammar-translation and the Oral-Structural Approach (see Chapter Four), undermined the functional and communicative potentials of language. Then, they proposed to focus on communicative proficiency rather than mere mastery of grammar and vocabulary (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Advocates of Communicative Language Teaching often referred to works of British functional linguists, D.A. Wilkins and M.A.K. Halliday, and American sociolinguist Dell Hymes (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) as key contributions to the formulation of CLT. Particularly, Wilkins's famous book *Notional Syllabuses* (1976) made a ground-breaking impact on the development of Communicative Language Teaching. By means of Wilkins's classic book plus British and American scholars' keen promotion, Communicative Language Teaching flourished and spread throughout Europe, America and the rest of the globe from

mid 1970s.

In addition to obtaining insights from education and linguistic sciences, other related fields such as psychology and anthropology also contributed to the formation of CLT. For example, Habermas (1970) adopted an ontological view to social interaction, particularly to human communication. In his view, human language was the tool to interpret the meanings conveyed in a discourse between participants. More simply, language is a communicative action. Communicative acts were understood as meaningful exchanges of information using either spoken or written means. Thus, the crux of Communicative Language Teaching was to engender a communicative proficiency in language learners.

As foreshadowed in Chapter Two, Communicative Language Teaching is by definition more than an approach because there are relatively varied ways of understanding CLT exercises and activities, depending on the purposes, needs and interests of the learners. Some scholars may prefer the plural form, Communicative Approaches, as no single agreement has been achieved to what precisely constitutes a 'Communicative Approach' (Tongue, 1980). In this study, the term 'Communicative Approach' is discarded because it cannot depict the notion Communicative Language Teaching unambiguously enough.

Given that theories of language and language learning have substantial influence in shaping language teaching and learning experience present on the communicative syllabus, theoretical assumptions that informed CLT have been discerned.



### 5.3.2 Theory of Language

Despite varying interpretations of CLT practice, there is a general consensus that Communicative Language Teaching presents a theory of language as communication. In addition, “the act of communication is multi-faceted and indivisible” (Johnson, 1981, p. 47).

Central to CLT is the notion of communicative competence. Hymes (1972) contrasts communicative competence to Chomsky’s idea of linguistic competence, which is in essence an abstract grammatical knowledge (i.e., grammar and vocabulary). In Hymes’s view, communicative competence refers to needs and familiarity of a speaker to know the culture and strategies in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Halliday also pledges a functional account of language. Likewise, Canale and Swain (1980) further define four dimensions of communicative competence: *grammatical competence*, *sociolinguistic competence*, *discourse competence*, and *strategic competence*. Altogether, these complementary views from various schools of thought form the basis of understanding of Communicative Language Teaching in terms of theory of language. The theoretical characteristics of CLT are summarized in Figure 5.1:

Theory of Language	Theory of Language Learning
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Language is a system for the expression of meaning</li> <li>2. The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication</li> <li>3. The structure of language reflects its function and communicative uses</li> <li>4. The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Communication principle: activities that involve real communication promote learning</li> <li>2. Task principle: Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning (Johnson 1982)</li> <li>3. Meaningfulness principle: language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process</li> </ol>

**Figure 5.1 Theories of language and language learning of Communicative Language Teaching (based on Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 161)**

Subsequently, this theory of language entails a corresponding set of language learning (and teaching) theory underlying Communicative Language Teaching.

### 5.3.3 Theory of Language Learning

At the level of language learning theory, “common to all versions of Communicative Language Teaching is a theory of language teaching that starts from a communicative model of language and language use” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 158). CLT promises to deliver three principles related to language learning: *communication principle*, *task principle* and *meaningfulness principle*. Their definitions have been offered in Figure 5.1 above.

In addition, some theories of ELT are compatible with CLT. Stephen D. Krashen, an eminent second language acquisition theorist who distinguishes between acquisition and learning, advocates that language learning comes about using language communicatively, rather than through practicing language skills



(Richards & Rodgers, 2001). A cognitive and psychological view of language learning is increasingly prominent in this regard.

#### **5.4 Communicative Language Teaching Manifested in the 1981 Syllabus**

Starting from this section, effort has been put to identify evidence of Communicative Language Teaching manifested in the intended English curriculum of Hong Kong primary schools. The 1981 syllabus, end-product of a curriculum development process, was the key curriculum artefact which shed light on CLT.

Throughout this chapter, it has been stressed that the 1981 syllabus captured the essence of CLT. It was a communicative syllabus. But what made this primary English syllabus communicative? What were the common characteristics that the 1981 syllabus shared with CLT? And more importantly, what insights could be gleaned about the first two research questions in this study?

By and large, the 1981 syllabus followed the theoretical assumptions of the Communicative Language Teaching very closely. Figure 5.2 shows an abridged organizational schema of twelve principles extracted from section IV of the syllabus, which altogether formed the basis of Communicative Language Teaching to the English language in Hong Kong:



<b>Principles related to language</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The language taught should be real language and not contrived for the purposes of language teaching</li> <li>2. The language taught should be contextualized so that the meaning is clear from the context</li> <li>3. The language should be recycled, thus reinforcing and extending the pupils' mastery</li> </ol>
<b>Principles related to language learning</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The interest of the learner should be of central concern since there is an aid to motivation</li> <li>2. Language should be taught realistically and the activities used should incorporate meaningful communication activities</li> <li>3. The needs of the student must be taken into consideration both in teaching and materials design</li> <li>4. There should be an immediate result to the activities</li> <li>5. Interaction needs to be a focus of the teaching</li> <li>6. The structural content and ordering of the syllabus will be dictated by the nature of the activities and tasks and not by the grammar book</li> <li>7. The language skills should be taught in an integrated way rather than separately</li> <li>8. English should be used at all times in the classroom</li> <li>9. Listening and reading comprehension should be nurtured besides the productive usage and learning</li> </ol>

**Figure 5.2 An abridged summary of twelve principles modelling Communicative Language Teaching in Hong Kong (based on CDC, 1981, pp. 22-27; cf. Milanovic, 1985, p. 55)**

One critical feature accompanying the above twelve CLT principles was the central role of learners in the process of language learning:

The major principle being followed in this revised syllabus is the paying of greater attention to the learner, his needs and his interests. It is essential, of course, that language forms continue to be controlled; they should no longer be controlling. (CDC, p. 13)

The twelve principles highlighted learner's needs and interests; language forms, especially spoken forms in the Oral-Structural Approach, no longer formed the

sole emphasis in the 1981 syllabus. Meaningful use of communicative functions in activities like 'Crossing the Information Gap' (i.e., p. 42) and 'Getting Things Done' (i.e., p. 47) were being stressed. It was increasingly convincing that "meaningful use of the language for purposes of communication represents an essential element in successful language learning" (HKCDC, p. 21). In all, the 1981 syllabus promoted the communicative means with a focus on contents rather than forms (Sze, 1992). It aimed to engage learners in purposeful and authentic communication as a springboard in language learning.

Another characteristic feature of CLT in Hong Kong was the division of English learning and teaching into four stages where Stage One (S1) and Stage Two (S2) were devoted to primary schooling. Contrary to earlier syllabuses, the 1981 syllabus included a compilation of pre-determined aims and goals. Young (1981) has used an analogy of route-map and destination to mark the distinction between the Oral-Structural Approach and Communicative Language Teaching. The earlier grammar-based syllabuses served as route-maps, guiding learners go through English structures step-by-step and provoked pupils to master language items and grammar sequentially. However, the communication-based syllabus just specified what pupils were expected to learn by S1 and S2 during primary schooling. There was no rigid schedule of what should be taught first, which the previous syllabuses had imposed. Only gross outlines and scope were presented without narrowly-defined specifications in the 1981 syllabus. Hence, more flexibility and freedom were granted to teachers, textbook writers and learners.

## **5.5 Analysis of Pedagogical Features**

Basically, this section seeks to respond to two questions: How should English be taught? Why should it be taught that way? By using the analytical framework of Johnson (1977) for analysis, questions relating to the intended English curriculum are addressed: What were the goals and objectives of the syllabus? What was the content that pupils were expected to learn? What was the organization of teaching materials? What were the teaching methods and learning activities employed in the communicative syllabus? What kind of assessment procedures was adopted? Beyond that, strengths and limitations of the pedagogical features of the primary English syllabus have been examined.

### **5.5.1 Goal Setting**

At the onset, five aims of primary education were explicitly stated on the front page of the primary English syllabus, which were lacking in former syllabuses. In brief, they were related to individual improvement, interpersonal relationships, academic knowledge, physical fitness and aesthetic appreciation. All of them were supposed to be applied in and consistent with all other subject guidelines.

Apart from the above five general yet ultimate goals to be fulfilled throughout primary education, the syllabus also listed fourteen general objectives of learning English in two categories:



Within Hong Kong	Outside Hong Kong
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An official language</li> <li>2. A language of formal study</li> <li>3. A language of continuing education</li> <li>4. A language of business, commerce, science and banking</li> <li>5. A language of social value</li> <li>6. A language of pleasure and entertainment</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The principal language of wider communication throughout the world</li> <li>2. Principal language of science and technology</li> <li>3. English as a tool for study</li> <li>4. English as a valuable asset in the working life</li> <li>5. English as the key to communication with the world outside Hong Kong</li> <li>6. English as the language of government and officialdom</li> <li>7. English as a medium of pleasure and entertainment</li> <li>8. English as the medium of communication with other inhabitants of Hong Kong</li> </ol>

**Figure 5.3. Functions of English within and outside Hong Kong (based on CDC, 1981, pp. 9-12)**

Unlike the earlier syllabuses, the 1981 syllabus listed all the immediate as well as long-term communicative functions that primary pupils in Hong Kong might perform (see Figure 5.3 above). The majority of these had utilitarian orientations concerning learners’ instrumental motivations, albeit a few English functions were related to individual enrichment and pleasure. It could be readily observed that practical use and knowledge of the English language was desired because it matched the economic development of Hong Kong during the 1980s (i.e., Hong Kong as an international business hub).

Sze (1992) pointed out one deficit in identifying the needs and communicative goals expected of learners. That is, no needs analysis was conducted to pinpoint the pupils’ long-term and short-term needs in planning the English curriculum. Presumably, the above communicative functions that English served were merely speculations from syllabus writers. They did not necessarily

enable learners to attain the communicative objectives of the curriculum. It was accepted that needs and purposes were not identified cautiously when primary schoolchildren started learning English at the age of six. Nevertheless, the syllabus reminded teachers “a further aim which should be kept in mind throughout is to teach English in such a way that pupils are helped to ‘learn how to learn’” (CDC, p. 13). In all, the overall goal in developing learners’ functional and communicative success was sustained in the entire syllabus.

#### 5.5.2 Curriculum Selection

Communicative Language Teaching employs a meaningful context in teaching content. In this primary English syllabus, two inventories specified the items to be taught according to pupils’ learning stages: one inventory was communicative functions and uses of English and the other one was language items. For example in Stage Two, pupils would be learning the following communicative contents:

- Ask all the questions about English a learner needs to be able to ask  
(spelling, meaning, etc.)
  - Talk about money and the prices of things
  - Talk about geographical locations, using main compass points
  - Refer to illness and disabilities
  - Make simple comparisons of various kinds
  - Make formal request
  - Make simple suggestions
  - Give a polite invitation
- (Abridged from CDC, 1981, pp. 88-89)

For vocabulary, the syllabus also comprised a suggested word list of 1500 words that was modified from Michael West’s *A General Service List of English Words* (1953) and contributions from Dr. Cheung Yat-shing.

Apart from inventories and the vocabulary list, the syllabus also gave comprehensive guidelines on language teaching activities, tasks, and games in which the primary role was to facilitate communicative language use. It would be hard to operationalize Communicative Language Teaching by giving too much teaching contents, at least on the level of the syllabus. However, the 1981 syllabus has provided an abundant supply of exemplary teaching materials.

There are two important observations that are concluded by Sze (1992) regarding the proposed teaching content. One is that there is no indication of how the function items were listed. The other is that no indication of how the two inventories mutually supported each other is provided. These concerns were sensible because without proper rationales, the inventories were merely prescriptions, replacing lists of structures with categories of communicative functions. It is therefore more desirable if the syllabus provides detailed reasons for the selection of materials.

### 5.5.3 Curriculum Structuring

The earlier syllabuses presented a rigid teaching plan led by the grammatical items to be taught listed on the syllabuses. Conversely, the communicative syllabus offered a considerable degree of freedom for textbook publishers, teachers and learners to decide and select what should be learnt according to the communicative functions recommended.

Unlike the grammatical syllabus that presented the grammatical items according to the grammatical complexity, this syllabus organized teaching



materials so as to be commensurate with the learning stages of the learners. The general learning sequence followed the *presentation-practice-production* mode. That is, the teachers presented the items directly or indirectly, and pupils were engaged in repetitive grammar practice until they were ready for communicative and functional activities. Therefore, the presentation of items is extremely important: "The key to successful language learning is the ability to associate the new language learned with human interaction, both social and intellectual, and to use this language for one's own needs" (CDC, 1981, p. 30). Thus, communicative language learning activities were formulated.

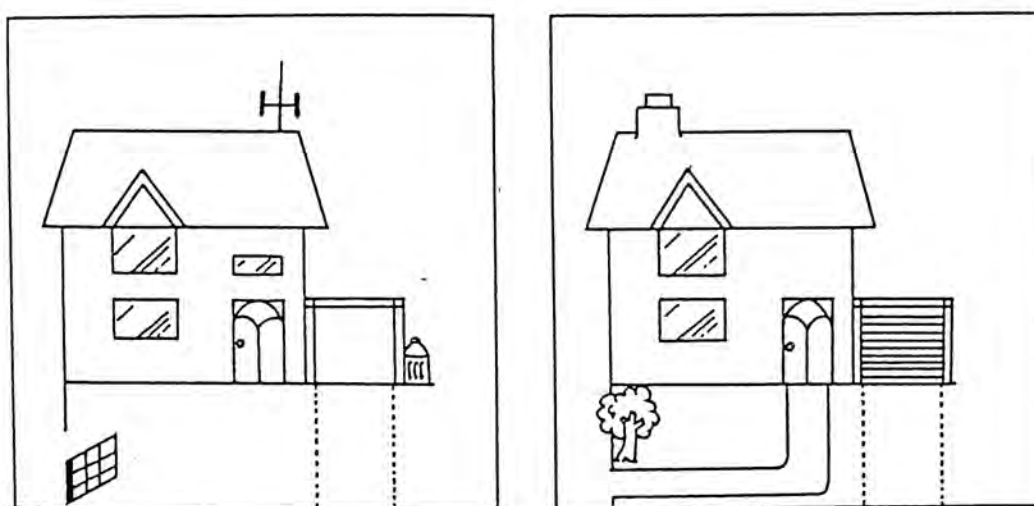
#### 5.5.4 Instructional Planning

In the 1981 syllabus, three repertoires of classroom learning activities could be identified: *manipulative exercises*, *communicative activities*, and *pre-language arts*. *Manipulative exercises* were designed to let pupils practice and manipulate formal features of language such as grammar and vocabulary. One famous exercise, *Simon Says*, was a popular game that trained pupils to attend to forms:

Teacher: Simon says, A banana  
Class: A banana  
Teacher: Peter says, An elephant  
Class: (Silent)  
Teacher: Simon says, An orange  
Class: An orange  
Teacher: An apple  
Class: (Silent)  
(from CDC, 1981, p. 33)

*Communicative activities* provided learners chances to purposefully use the language forms they had acquired. *Spot The Difference* was a game in which

pupils were given two pictures which differed from each other in, say, ten ways (see example below). Half of the group/class was given one of these pictures, and by questioning their pair-partner pupils must find from the other half of the group/class discover the differences; they then wrote the answers down. Pupils were, therefore, given opportunities to integrate both meaning and communication in order to cross the information gap.



(from CDC, 1981, p. 45)

*Pre-language arts activities* often delivered an enjoyable and entertaining language learning experience in addition to learning grammar and communicative functions. The 1981 syllabus suggested five types of pre-language arts activities:

1. Fun with letters of the alphabet
2. Fun with words
3. Songs, verses, rhymes, and jingles
4. Role-playing
5. Story-telling by the teacher

In short, many language learning activities integrated various linguistic skills and were task-orientated as “they provide ‘actual meaning’ by setting the learner tasks which require the use of language, whereas success or failure is judged in terms of whether or not these tasks have been successfully completed” (CDC, 1981, p, 32). This concept has urged the introduction of more formative assessments instead of mere summative assessments in the upcoming syllabus.

#### 5.5.5 Technical Evaluation

The 1981 syllabus devoted a whole chapter to testing. In fact, having a good assessment method was indispensable to providing teachers information about the pupils’ progress and weaknesses (CDC, 1981). If assessment procedures were carefully set, they not only provided clear incentives for pupils to study, but they also unified different teachers’ beliefs’ on the focus of language teaching (Sze, 1992). What’s more, the backwash effect of testing could exert a prominent effect over the entire curriculum.

The 1981 syllabus asserted that “attention should be paid in selecting the test items to both form and function” (CDC, p. 79) simply because communicative competence was the key concept in Communicative Language Teaching. The syllabus writers emphasize that attention needed to be placed on testing both forms and functions (Milanovic, 1985). As a result, communicative success as well as formal correctness were the foci of instructional assessment.

However, there was a complete absence of formative evaluation suggested by the syllabus. Only a summative instrument like dictation was stressed to assess



accuracy. A truly formative assessment was lacking. Without a new set of assessment beliefs and practices, the extent of how much the communicative syllabus has progressed remained to be known.

## **5.6 Discussion of the Hong Kong Adaptation of CLT**

### **5.6.1 Merits**

Communicative Language Teaching was introduced to Hong Kong in 1981. There were speculations whether or not it would be a panacea or a universal remedy for the declining English standard at that time. The answer is still beyond the scope of this investigation but certain criteria suggest that Communicative Language Teaching has merits over the obsolete Oral-Structural Approach.

A drawback that can be levelled at the Oral-Structural Approach was that there was an imbalance of emphasis on grammatical forms and communicative functions (CDC, 1981). So, in order to discard undesirable effect, the major premise of CLT was to actively engage learners in meaningful communication in order to learn the target language. No wonder Communicative Language Teaching gained popularity over the Oral-Structural Approach so quickly: “There is little doubt that communicative language teaching, with its primary focus on using language for meaningful interaction and for accomplishing tasks, rather than on learning rules, has won support from many teachers and learners” (Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 40). Its influence even extended beyond the 1981 syllabus.

While Communicative Language Teaching was a popular approach to teachers, from the pedagogical standpoint, it did not underacknowledge the

teaching of grammar, the formal system of language. Teaching formal features (i.e., parts of speech) and communicative functions (i.e., returning a compliment) were of equal importance to CLT. The 1981 syllabus tried to avoid the prescription of language structures as it would be pedagogically difficult to predict and preview the linguistic realizations in a discourse. Two scholars, Rogers (1981) and Johnson (1981) also hold similar views respectively: "A communicative syllabus cannot reliably predict the various forms that are likely to occur in a particular communicative contact" (Rogers, 1981, p. 23); "list of words, types of phrases, clauses and sentences do not and cannot adequately characterize the aims and objectives of a language programme, but neither can lists of functions, or situations, or topics" (Johnson, 1981, p. 43). Furthermore, one emergent feature of Communicative Language Teaching was the changing roles of pupils and teachers in the classroom: "The communicative approach has reinforced in language teaching the general movement in education from 'teacher-centred' to 'learner-centred' pedagogy" (Johnson, 1985, p. 30). This movement matched the changing pedagogical trend in foreign/second language learning worldwide.

Contrary to the Oral-Structural Approach's behaviourist habit-formation view of language learning and teaching, Communicative Language Teaching subscribed to the functional view of language:

This theory emphasizes the semantic and communicative dimension rather than merely the grammatical characteristics of language, and leads to a specification and organization of language teaching content by categories of meaning and function rather than by elements of structure and grammar.

(Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 21)

For this reason, the functional orientation of Communicative Language Teaching has welcomed by eager teachers and students.

#### 5.6.2 Demerits

Like many other curriculum innovations, suspicion was not difficult to detect at the initial stages of the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching. By definition, Communicative Language Teaching meant more than the phrase just to 'be communicative' in language learning situations; moreover, different people had different expectations from it. For instance, Johnson (1985) showed his doubt in its application in primary schools: "The difficulties relate primarily to establishing principled means of structuring and grading the content of a communicative programme, particularly for the early stages of language learning" (Johnson, 1985, p. 31). It was speculated that students with a homogenous linguistic background, (i.e., Cantonese in Hong Kong) were not a favourable learner population for the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching. Pupils saw no immediate need to learn English as they could swiftly turn to their common language to communicate.

Another stream of criticisms were similar to Etherton (1981) who had quoted Anita Pincas's words that "communicative practice in the classroom is not only by definition unrealistic, but ad hoc and tentative" (Etherton, 1981, p. 17). Some even argued that CLT defeated the long tradition of TEFL/TESL instead of leading to language success.



## 5.7 Syllabus and Communicative Language Teaching

Howatt (1984) proposed that Communicative Language Teaching could be further subcategorised into weak and strong versions. In brief, a weak version of CLT provides a chance for learners to use English for communicative purposes although it aims to integrate the activities into language teaching and learning. On the other hand, the strong version implies that language is acquired through communication (Howatt, 1984). According to Howatt's (1984) definition, the 1981 syllabus tended to promote a weak version of CLT even though a strong version was more favourable for Hong Kong.

We could learn from the 1981 syllabus that major curriculum developments in teaching and learning English in Hong Kong followed western trends (Sze, 1992). This was not an issue peculiar to Communicative Language Teaching, but also to the Oral-Structural Approach adopted in former syllabuses. The external predecessors were particularly crucial for small territories like Hong Kong because it was straightforward to look for relevant models overseas. As a result, "few decisions in the past were the result of research on language teaching and learning in the local context" (Sze, 1992, p. 24). Also, it was not surprising that Hong Kong had a long tradition of recruiting expatriate experts to be involved in curriculum planning.

To reconcile the sole influence from foreign ideas, Sze (1992) suggested that "instead of transplanting a western experience into Hong Kong, language curriculum development needs to be informed by findings from local research into

second language learning and teaching” (Sze, 1992, p. 29). He further proposed that in-service language teachers at the frontline could be the people who initiated curriculum reforms.

As a syllabus is the product of curriculum design, the 1981 syllabus has specified products rather than the communicative processes. Therefore, parallel to the external syllabus, “each learner must create a personal, albeit implicit, syllabus as part of learning” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 165).

## **5.8 Summary of Chapter Five**

To recap, the primary English Syllabus in 1981 was an earnest endeavour to promulgate Communicative Language Teaching in Hong Kong. Communicative Language Teaching refers to a diverse set of principles that employs a communicative and functional view of language and language learning. Communicative Language Teaching departs from the behaviourists’ idea that language learning was defined as decontextualized habit-formation learning. CLT highlighted the importance of communicative competence and success in addition to emphasis on forms and vocabulary. Because of greater attention to learners’ needs and interests, it remains the most long-lasting in-use syllabus in Hong Kong. Hitherto, the impact of Communicative Language Teaching even sustains beyond the introduction of the syllabus of the Target Oriented Curriculum and Task-Based Language Teaching—the subject of Chapter Six.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The 1997 primary English syllabus subscribes to the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC). The TOC is the most comprehensive and stimulating language curriculum reform unprecedented in Hong Kong. Central to the TOC is the language teaching methodology Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which is a recent innovation from the classic Communicative Language Teaching model developed in the 1980s. This chapter is devoted to the discussion of the TOC, and more specifically, TBLT.

To begin, section 6.2 approaches the historical background and various reasons for the renewal of the 1997 syllabus. Section 6.3 traces the origins and theoretical underpinnings of the Target Oriented Curriculum and Task-Based Language Teaching. Section 6.4 focuses on the characteristics of the TOC patented in the primary English syllabus of Hong Kong. Section 6.5 provides an analysis of the pedagogical features of the 1997 syllabus by using the analytical framework of Johnson (1977). Section 6.6 synthesizes insights and attempts to draw a relation between syllabus design, TBLT and the TOC. Section 6.7 concludes the whole chapter by summarizing major developments of the TOC. Given that the TOC and TBLT overlap with each other in many contexts, these two terms can be interpreted synonymously throughout the rest of the chapter.



## **6.2 Rationale for Introducing the TOC in the 1997 Syllabus**

Since 1990, about a decade after Communicative Language Teaching was introduced to Hong Kong in the former syllabus, the last colonial government had begun another chain of curriculum reform with a new initiative called Targets and Target-Related Assessment (TTRA). This transitional model was first constructed as a response to recommendations in Education Commission Report No. 4 (1990) (ECR 4), which mapped out a mastery-learning programme by setting attainment targets in various domains (or dimensions); locating a clear sense of direction in learning; and informing teachers, pupils, parents and society at large pupils' expected learning outcomes in various stages of learning. In May 1993, TTRA was renamed to the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) to reflect the fact that the initiative is a full curriculum rather than only consisting of targets and assessment components (Institute of Language in Education, 1994).

Carless (1998) made a succinct summary of the nature of the TOC. It was a curriculum reform that involved changes of three curriculum components: targets, tasks and criterion-referenced assessment. The learning targets provided a common direction which schools in Hong Kong can abide by. Tasks were purposeful, contextualized learning activities which enable pupils to progress towards the targets. Criterion-referenced assessment fostered an evaluation benchmark to evaluate pupils' attainment according to the targets and this piece of information, in turn, was used to generate improvement. In sum, the alignment of targets, tasks and assessment formed an integrated curriculum framework,

combining teaching, learning and assessment in a recursive way.

In addition, the TOC was designed and introduced to improve the overall quality of individual learning by addressing several of the long-perceived educational problems at that time, for instance:

An overcrowded and fragmented curriculum; an over-emphasis on the rote-learning of discrete chunks of information; lack of awareness of the role of language in learning; limited efforts to cater for individual learner differences; assessment methods focused primarily on ranking students. (Carless, 1997, p. 354; cf. Clarks et al., 1994, pp. 10-11)

Reconciling the innovative curriculum components and problem-driven wishes, the TOC promoted a shift of the educational focus from quantitative provision to improving the quality of schooling in Hong Kong.

For the English language, four expatriate curriculum developers were commissioned by the Education Department to prepare and formulate the TOC framework. They were J.L. Clark, A. Scarino, J. Brownell, and W. Littlewood (ILE, 1994). Following the publication of two curriculum guidelines in 1994 and 1995, the *Syllabuses for Primary Schools—English Language (Primary 1-6)* was issued in 1997. At this moment, this syllabus is still in use at many primary schools within the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

There have certainly been other incentives for the syllabus change but only theoretically-motivated and practical reasons are shown here. Given that the 1981 syllabus is the first-generation communicative syllabus, the TOC would be the second-generation communicative syllabus with a focus on Task-Based Language Teaching. That is, the major premise of the TOC is the emphasis on task and

TBLT. While the TOC aspires to resolve some of the above-mentioned educational problems, an understanding of *task* has to be cultivated because it is frequently noted “teachers are generally unclear about the natures of tasks and the theory and practice of task-based learning” (Carless, 1999, p. 242). *Task* is a complicated concept and has many facets, and its full explanation would be delineated in the rest of this chapter gradually. As TBLT has an imperative effect on the TOC, the origins and its theories on language and language acquisition must be studied thoroughly.

### **6.3 Theoretical Basis of TBLT**

Task-Based Language Teaching embodies basic principles and philosophy of the Communicative Language Teaching paradigm: “Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) marks the beginning of a major paradigm shift within language teaching in the twentieth century, one whose ramifications continue to be felt today” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 151). The emphasis on tasks consolidates CLT in the 1997 syllabus. Hence, it is essential to examine the theoretical underpinnings of Task-Based Language Teaching with respect to ELT under the broad framework of the TOC.

#### **6.3.1 Genesis of TBLT**

Frankly speaking, the notion of task is not a brand new concept in CLT paradigm, yet TBLT refers to tasks being placed as the centre of the methodological focus: “Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in



language teaching” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 223). One of the earliest uses of *task* in an educational context was believed to have been in vocational training practices in the 1950s and subsequently military training (Richards & Rodger, 2001).

However, submitting tasks in language education only happened much later. Richards and Rodgers (2001) have identified two early applications of tasks within Communicative Language Teaching: Malaysian Communicational Syllabus (1975) and the Bangalore Project. At the same time, there are pioneers who propagated tasks, not least TBLT, in foreign/second language learning. SLA researchers such as Long and Crookes and TBLT advocates, namely Willis, have been keen to study how tasks can nurture language learning by engaging learners in meaningful contexts.

### 6.3.2 Theory of Language

In spite of the fact that TBLT and CLT are highly similar on the level of theory of language, one salient feature that can be singled out is the emphasis on vocabulary in foreign/second language learning than was traditionally assumed. In TBLT, vocabulary has as a broader scope than merely referring to words. It can refer to lexical phrases, sentence stems, prefabricated routines, and collocations. The expanding scope of vocabulary is owing to the increasingly popular belief of the lexicalized nature of language: “many linguists and psycholinguists have argued that native language speech processing is very frequently lexical in nature” (Skehan, 1996, pp. 21-22). Yet, there is no conclusive evidence on whether the

nature of language is likely to be grammatical or lexical. Nevertheless, the focus on vocabulary arises in TBLT due to the increasing acceptance towards the lexical nature of language. Furthermore, TBLT inherits lots of comparable principles with CLT in terms of theory of language and language learning, especially the communicative nature of language. The theoretical characteristics of TBLT are summarized in Figure 6.1 below:

Theory of Language	Theory of Language Learning
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Language is primarily a means of making meaning</li> <li>2. Multiple models of language inform task-based instruction</li> <li>3. Lexical units are central in language use and language learning</li> <li>4. Conversation is the central focus of language and the keystone of language acquisition</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tasks provide both the input and output processing necessary for language acquisition</li> <li>2. Task activity and achievement are motivational</li> <li>3. Learning difficulty can be negotiated and fine-tuned for particular pedagogical purposes</li> </ol>

**Figure 6.1 Theories of language and language learning of Task-Based Language Teaching (based on Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 226-229)**

### 6.3.3 Theory of Language Learning

Above all, TBLT is motivated by a theory of learning rather than a theory of language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Similar to Communicative Language Teaching, TBLT shares the general assumptions based on the constructivist view of learning. It is communicative, task-based and product-oriented. In addition to the CLT theories of language learning (see Figure 5.1), three task-based principles are added (in Figure 6.1). On the level of language learning, tasks are strategic means and processes in language acquisition as they can be incorporated into

various contexts. In other words, an ideal task should strive to be genuinely authentic and purposeful and should cater to the interests and communicative needs of particular groups of learners.

#### **6.4 TBLT Manifested in the 1997 Syllabus**

Subsequently, effort has been put to identify evidence of Task-Based Language Teaching manifested under the framework of the Target Oriented Curriculum. The 1997 primary English syllabus, an official document of the curriculum development, was the key artefact which orchestrates the TOC and TBLT.

As foreshadowed, the Target Oriented Curriculum is essentially based on a constructivist view of learning (Marton, 2000). “Learning should be experiential rather than instructional since learners learn best through activities that demand active involvement” (CDC, 1997, p. 49). And task is the means to achieve the goal. So, how does the CDC define what a *task* is? “Language tasks and projects are effective activities for the development of communicative competence.” (CDC, 1997, p. 12). As outlined in the syllabus, the chief means to help learners progress towards these learning targets are the learning tasks, which trigger active, purposeful, contextualized use of learners’ language skills. Integrative language use is stressed.

Apart from the emphasis on task, the CDC stresses that similar understanding of language and language learning can be equally effective in CLT and TBLT. For instance, “the Communicative Approach to the teaching of English is advocated in



this Syllabus. The teaching strategies developed under the Communicative Approach are therefore relevant and highly recommended” (CDC, 1997, p. 12). In order to foster a higher motivation for pupils, the first few years of primary English curriculum supply a more friendly yet less demanding learning atmosphere: “Key Stage 1 and 2 focus on laying the foundation of English language development through interesting activities” (CDC, 1997, p. 11). In broader terms, the 1997 syllabus is based on five principles of curriculum design: target-oriented, five fundamental intertwining ways of learning and using knowledge, communicative purposes, learner-centred, and integrative language use. And they are all realized in the pedagogical features of the intended English curriculum.

As compared with the former syllabus, the 1997 syllabus can be perceived as an extension of CLT. Despite similar orientations in terms of language and language learning between the two, innovative pedagogical features have been highlighted in the following analysis.

### **6.5 Analysis of Pedagogical Features**

This section aims to achieve two goals by posing two questions: How should English be taught under the TOC and TBLT? Why should it be taught that way? By using the analytical framework of Johnson (1977) for analysis, key questions relating to the planned English curriculum are addressed: What were the goals and objectives of the syllabus? What was the content that pupils were expected to acquire? What was the organizational rhetoric like? What were the teaching

methods and learning activities employed in the 1997 syllabus? What type of assessment procedures was adopted? So, let’s have a look at some concrete illustrations of the key pedagogical features.

### 6.5.1 Goal Setting

In the TOC, the general learning goal for English learners is to “develop an ever-improving capability to use English; to think and communicate; to acquire, develop and apply knowledge; to respond and give expression to experience” (CDC, 1997, p. 10). This is compatible with the overall design of the English curriculum. Under the broad umbrella of the TOC, the five generic and fundamental intertwining ways of learning and using knowledge are communicating, conceptualizing, inquiring, problem-solving and reasoning. Because of the recognition of whole-person and life-long educational goals, an integrative language use is reckoned. In particular, three learning dimensions are deemed crucial to English learners: Interpersonal Dimension (ID), Knowledge Dimension (KD), and Experience Dimension (ED). Their representative features are listed in the Table 6.1 below:

<i>Interpersonal Dimension (ID)</i>	
Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2
To establish and maintain relationships and routines in carrying out classroom activities	To establish and maintain relationships and routines in <b>school and other familiar situations</b>
To exchange short simple messages such as writing greeting cards and notes	To exchange messages such as writing <b>simple letters, making telephone calls and sending postcards and invitations</b>
To obtain and provide objects and information in simple classroom situations and through activities such as interactive games and role-play	To obtain and provide objects, <b>services</b> and information in classroom situations and through activities such as interactive games and <b>simple open-ended</b> role play



<i>Knowledge Dimension (KD)</i>	
To provide or find out and present simple information on familiar topics	To provide or find out, <b>organize</b> and present simple information on familiar topics
To state opinions using information and ideas in simple spoken and written texts	To <b>identify ideas</b> in simple spoken and written texts, <b>form opinions and express them</b>
To recognize and solve simple problems in given situations	To recognize and solve simple problems in given situations, <b>and describe the solutions</b>

<i>Experience Dimension (ED)</i>	
To develop an awareness and an enjoyment of the basic sound patterns of English in imaginative texts through activities such as participating in action rhymes, singing songs and choral speaking	To develop an awareness of the basic sound patterns of English <b>and an enjoyment</b> of imaginative texts through activities such as <b>reciting poems and rhymes</b> , singing songs <b>and presenting short simple plays</b>
To respond to characters and events in simple imaginative and other narrative texts through oral, written and performative means such as: Making predictions Making simple evaluative remarks Drawing pictures, making simple models or objects Creating captions Describing one's related experiences Participating in the telling of stories	To respond to characters and events in imaginative and other narrative texts through oral, written and performative means such as: Making predictions <b>Making inferences</b> Making evaluative <b>comments</b> <b>Describing one's feelings towards characters and events</b> <b>Relating to</b> one's experiences <b>Imagining oneself to be a character in the story and describing one's feelings and reactions</b> <b>Participating in dramatic activities</b>
Note: Additional features embodied in Key Stage 2 are presented in bold.	

**Table 6.1      An abridged summary of Interpersonal Dimension, Knowledge Dimension and Experience Dimension in KS1 and KS2 of the English language curriculum**

The three dimensions highlight and define various purposes that English serves to the elementary language learners. It should be noted that authentic and



integrative use always' involves two to three dimensions.

#### 6.5.2 Curriculum Selection

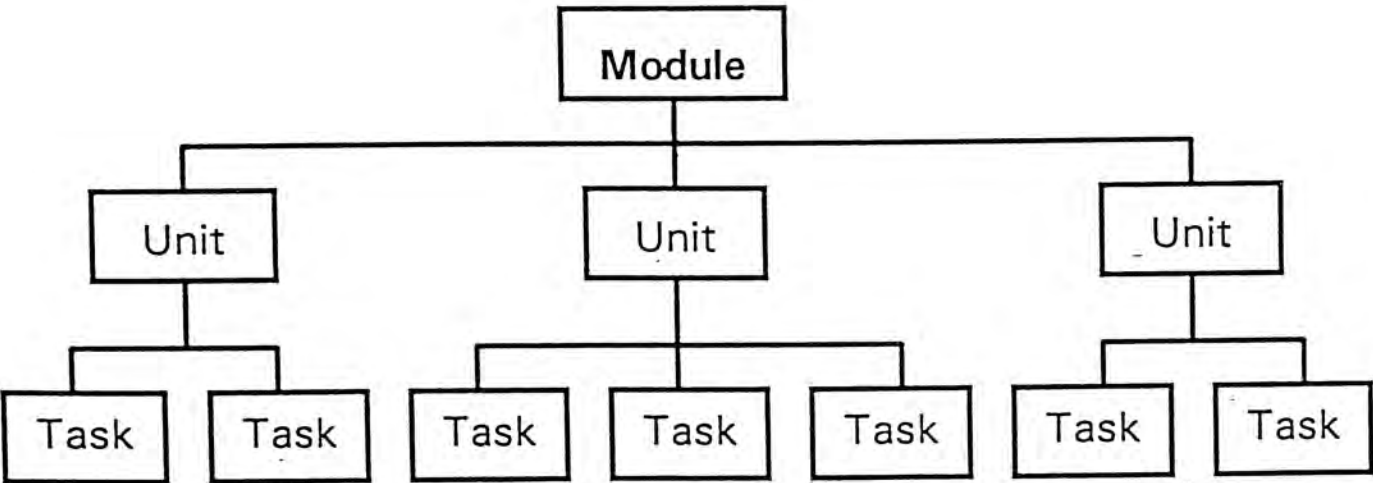
Apart from learning targets and dimensions, the 1997 syllabus also lists the learning objectives which specify the contents of English language teaching and learning. It is anticipated that learners can apply the acquired knowledge in purposeful real-life communicative situations. Four macro language skills including listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as appropriate strategies and attitudes are cultivated. Phonics and vocabulary are introduced as enabling skills to support the development of the macro skills.

For vocabulary, "it is introduced through Modules, Units and Tasks" (CDC, 1997, p. 24). As a result, vocabulary is in authentic and natural context with certain themes for use. "It is therefore not advisable to prescribe or suggest a vocabulary list out of context for each Key Stage" (CDC, 1997, p. 25). This is indeed a sound improvement in terms of syllabus design and vocabulary learning.

Besides, the syllabus also specifies the language forms and functions including text-types, vocabulary, communicative functions and language forms. Different types of text are employed to expand learners' repertoires in speech and writing. Examples are cartoons, diaries, jokes, letters, posters, rhymes, riddles, telephone calls, maps, recipes, stories, and weather reports. They are chosen because they relate to learners' needs, experience, interest and also from immediate context in classrooms and textbook materials. So, the pupils' learning goals are consolidated in this part.

6.5.3 Curriculum Structuring

Generally, the teaching content is selected and arranged in ascending level of difficulty. One prominent feature underlying the TOC is the hierarchical order of module, unit and task (see Figure 6.2): “In organizing teaching and learning, the concept of modules, units and tasks is applied” (CDC, 1997, p. 54). A module is a thematically-related or conceptually-related category of topics of teaching materials. Often, several interwoven tasks constitute a coherent unit. Materials developers and teachers can therefore tailor suitable and authentic materials to suit particular group of pupils and their interests.



**Figure 6.2** A diagram showing the hierarchy of Modules, Units and Tasks  
(Source: CDC, 1997, p. 54)

6.5.4 Instructional Planning

Within the TOC framework, a task constitutes many of the learning activities and thus affects the corresponding teaching methods. In designing exemplary

tasks and activities, three types of tasks can be identified: *pre-task*, *while-task* and *post-task* activities. They serve diverse functions in different stages of language learning. Subsequently, task-based activities of the four macro-skills are summarized in Table 6.2:



Steps	Macro-skills			
	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
<b>Pre-task</b>	Revision of learnt structures and vocabulary items <i>e.g., labelling</i>	learners are introduced to the pronunciation, forms, meanings and use of language <i>e.g., "Look and Say"</i>	The setting/background of the story or a text is introduced to learners with the help of illustrations <i>e.g., using quizzes, games etc. for revision of related vocabulary and structures</i>	Prepare learners for the structures, vocabulary <i>e.g., copying</i>
<b>While-Task</b>	Listen and respond to the task <i>e.g., complete the lyrics of a song</i>	Maximum intensive practice of the new language items in a realistic context <i>e.g., describing picnic</i>	Learners get the main idea of a text, pick up the key words and information, study the story content in greater detail, and learn the meanings and use some of the lexical items <i>e.g., transferring information to tables and maps</i>	Controlled and guided writing <i>e.g., write a birthday card to a friend</i>
<b>Post-task</b>	Extended practice of the target language <i>e.g., compile a shopping list</i>	Learners use the language newly acquired in freer and more creative ways <i>e.g., role playing</i>	Learners consolidate and reflect upon what has been read, and relate the text to their own knowledge, interest and experience <i>e.g., mini-dramas</i>	Free writing <i>e.g., create a short story</i>
<b>Remarks</b>	Authentic listening materials are used to prepare learners in real-life situations	Learners are exposed to various types of interactional opportunity which they will encounter outside the classroom	Task-based reading activities provide learners with a purpose for reading and the setting for involvement in the reading process; vocabulary building skills are acquired through intensive reading and then applied in extensive reading	The emphasis is on the process as well as the product.

Table 6.2      A table summarizing the procedures of various tasks in the four macro skills

As suggested by TBLT, a majority of activities demand active engagement of learners in target language learning. The idea of learner independence and self-directed learning become visible: “the learners should acquire the learning strategies, the knowledge about language learning, and the attitudes that enable them to use these strategies and knowledge confidently, flexibly, appropriately and independently” (CDC, 1997, p. 81). Furthermore, extra-curricular activities, for the first time, are seen as natural and realistic settings where pupils can realize their linguistic skills: “Language games, puppet shows, drama activities, choral speaking, designing slogans or greeting cards for special occasions, and recording short radio plays are some examples of interesting and purposeful extra-curricular activities for learners in primary schools” (CDC, 1997, p. 88). Therefore, tasks can be assigned as group work, pair work and even individual work. Autonomy and cooperative learning are promoted as learners bear greater responsibilities for their own language learning through tasks.

#### 6.5.5 Technical Evaluation

Another key feature of the TOC which was outlined in the 1997 syllabus is the changing perception of assessment. Criterion-referenced and formative modes of assessment are preferred in response to the recommendations in ECR 4. Also, the 1997 syllabus states:

In target-oriented assessment, criterion-referenced principles with systematic formative and summative assessment procedures are adopted. The purpose of assessment is to promote learning by providing learners and teachers with feedback on learner’s performance, which in turn enables teachers to adjust and refine their teaching plans. (CDC, 1997, p. 134)

Being aware of the advantages of criterion-referenced assessment, Carless (1999) outlines a comparison between traditional curricula and the TOC in terms of assessment in Figure 6.3.

<i>Approaches to assessment</i>	
<b>Traditional</b>	<b>TOC</b>
Norm-referenced	Criterion-referenced
Competitive	Co-operative
Summative	Formative
Quantitative	Qualitative
Product	Process
Discrete	Integrative
Objectivity	Subjectivity
Reliability	Validity

**Figure 6.3     Assessment emphases as dichotomies**  
**(Source: Carless, 1999, p. 249)**

Another feature is the integrative usage of dictation. It is helpful in training pupils’ listening, spelling and handwriting skills. Therefore, “it is used as a teaching strategy rather than a testing device” (CDC, 1997, p. 74). Owing to various kinds of dictation including picture, sequence and composition dictations, dictation serves as a good and short practice with variable learning goals every time. Therefore, dictation remains a popular classroom activity beyond merely being an assessment instrument.

**6.6   The TOC and Syllabus**

Although the TOC shares similar theoretical orientation to CLT as in the former syllabus, Adamson & Yin (1997) identify several key differences between the two syllabuses:

*1. Subject Aims*



## *2. Syllabus-based vs. Task-based*

### *3. Linear vs. Spiral (p. 5)*

It is agreed that the subject aims of the TOC are generally more extensive in scope. “The old syllabus focused on developing children’s communicative skills in English” (Adamson & Yin, 1997, p. 5) while the TOC extends beyond that to encourage thinking in English and develop an ever-improving capability to use English.

Concerning the difference between the 1981 communicative syllabus and the 1997 task-based syllabus, Interviewee A contributes a thoughtful insight:

But the old syllabus had a weakness which I agree with and that is the way in which the communicative approach was initially interpreted in other countries as well as Hong Kong. That was the P-P-P approach which was, you have in your syllabus a list of structures, a list of vocabulary, a list of functions. And what textbook writers tended to do was take them one by one. Today’s the present continuous tense and there are six ways of looking at the present continuous tense. Number one, practice, drill exercise. And then the teacher thinks of a weird context in which, maybe a strange dialogue or story where the present continuous tense comes in every line. Totally inauthentic. But that was still reckoned to be the communicative approach because it was looking at functions and notion, and language in use. The situation was so contrived and unrealistic. So, TOC in a sense, took it the other way. Instead of starting with an individual language item, you start off with a holistic situation and then you work out what the language items are needed for this situation. I agree with the criticisms of the old approach. It was quite dull. It was quite unrealistic, very hard to teach, very hard to think of realistic situations to practice individual language items in that way. (Appendix IV, p. 129)

Interviewee A has summarized the different starting points in designing materials according to the two syllabuses. The 1981 syllabus starts with individual items while the TOC starts with an authentic context. Central to syllabus design in Task-Based Language Teaching is task selection, sequencing and evaluation of

task performance. Unlike conventional syllabuses which specify teaching contents, the three dimensions Interpersonal Dimension, Knowledge Dimension and Experience Dimension are stressed. The tasks designed can therefore be more motivating and conducive for building higher cognitive and linguistic skills. Even though the 1981 syllabus claims to be communicative, when compared with the TOC, it is not quite communicative.

As task involves the holistic use of communicative language and is the primary source of pedagogical input in teaching, the design of the 1997 syllabus is indeed very teacher-friendly. "In TBLT, tasks are not employed for their own sake but as a means of facilitating learning" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 235). Furthermore, the 1997 syllabus stresses the need to facilitate lifelong language learning besides the immediate classroom learning. As a result, it is claimed to be an interactive syllabus as it only specifies the expected outcomes and not the teaching contents.

To supplement an insight that the TOC was not a smooth curriculum reform as it was presented above, conflicting concerns and dilemmas did exist during the implementation and dissemination of the TOC in English language:

This scenario was exacerbated by the features of the curriculum development and dissemination strategies employed, which included: the tendency to rely on bureaucratic procedures, the low level of involvement of practitioners in developing curricula, the strong washback effect from examinations, the failure to match forms of assessment and curricula goals, and the failure to support innovations with appropriate resources and teacher education programmes (Morris et al., 1996, p. 3).

Although the TOC was not well disseminated and implemented, the



incentives should never be discarded. As described by Morris et al. (1996), the TOC is the most significant landmark in curriculum reform in Hong Kong since World War II, given that it attempts to change the three key ‘message systems’, namely the nature of knowledge/schooling, pedagogy and assessment (see Figure 2.1 in Chapter Two).

## **6.7 Summary of Chapter Six**

As illustrated in this chapter, the Target Oriented Curriculum has a well-researched basis from the recommendation in Education Commission Report No. 4 (1990). The TOC was eclectically a hybrid product composing principles of Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching. The 1997 English syllabus can be viewed as an extension of the communicative syllabus that is implemented in the post-colonial era.

To recap, TBLT is a very powerful language teaching methodology as it promotes an interactionist view of language and language learning through the vehicle of tasks. It departs from CLT in that authentic, contextualized and purposeful tasks are adopted but with CLT principles enshrined in it. Strategically, TBLT has got potential to devise thematic and cross-curricula learning programmes conducive to English language learning.

Since TBLT and the TOC aspire to cater to individual difference in learning, the instructional mode tends to be pupil-centred. In summary, “Task-Based Teaching can be regarded as a recent version of a communicative methodology and seeks to reconcile methodology with current theories of second language



acquisition” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 151). Given all advantages and potentials of the TOC, better learning outcomes of the pupils are expected.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 Introduction

Unlike presenting findings analytically in previous chapters, this chapter synthesizes all collected data and highlights the salient features of the primary school English language curriculum in Hong Kong. The principal purpose of this chapter is to answer the three main research questions which were set out in Chapter One, and then to discuss the findings in connection with the relevant delineation in the literature review in Chapter Two. Finally, pedagogical implications and recommendations for further research are made.

Hong Kong has long had a reputation of frequent curriculum reform. For instance, Morris et al. (1996) have commented that “curriculum reform in Hong Kong in the post war period has been characterized by a pattern which can best be described as an amalgam of ad hoc adjustments, institution incrementalism and crisis ‘management’” (p. 1). Even though much of the criticism and apathy is usually well justified, studies concerning in-depth analysis of the theoretical dimension of curriculum are insufficient. Little research has been conducted in tracking the comprehensive theoretical development of English curriculum. In order to explore this gap, and as far as the syllabus is by virtue too important to be abandoned, this study has been conducted.

The following sections elaborate upon the theoretical and pedagogical features, and in doing so, provide detailed answers to the research questions

pursued in this study:

## **7.2 Research Question 1 (RQ 1)**

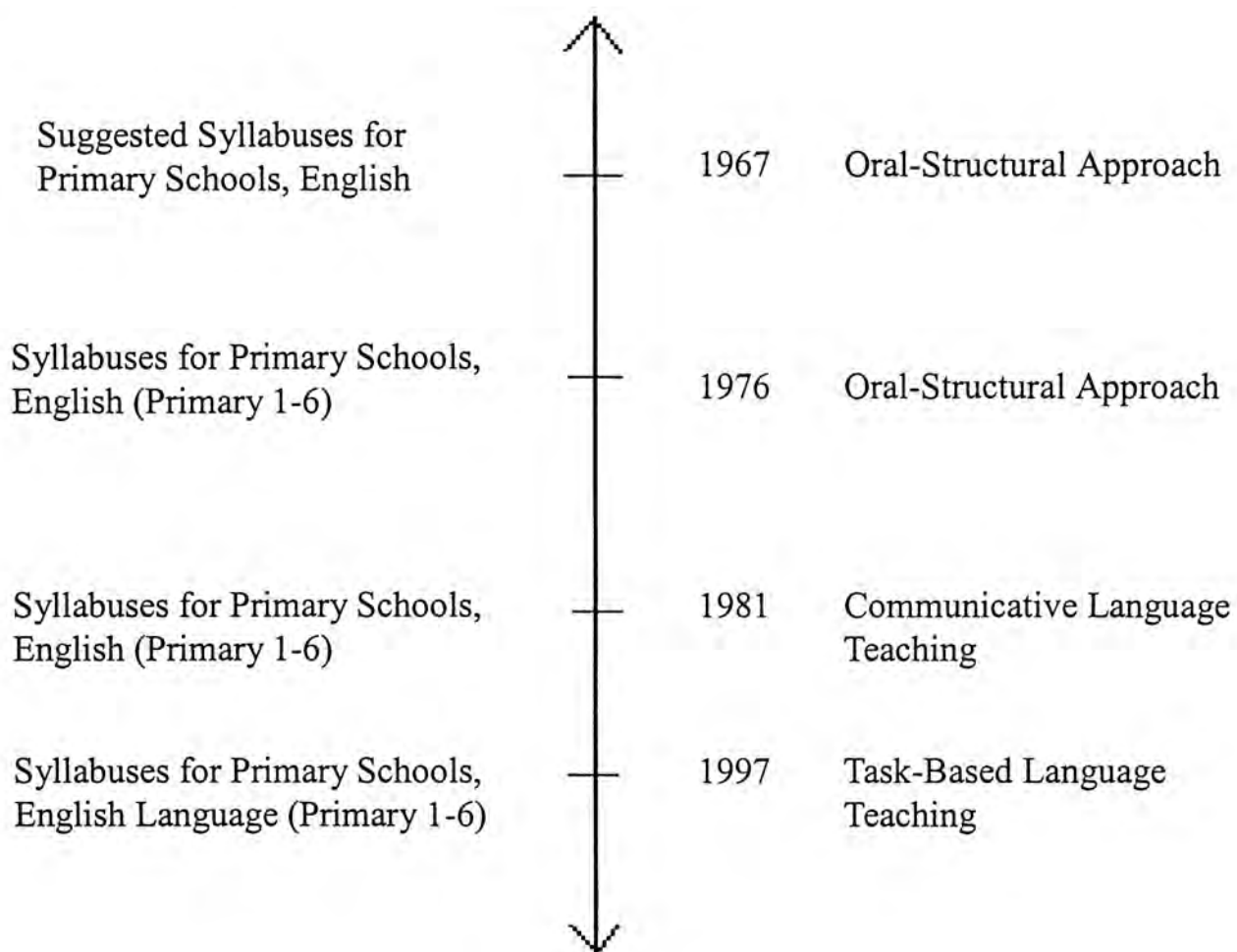
*What are the major English Language Teaching methodologies that are promoted in the four primary English syllabuses (1967, 1976, 1981 & 1997)?*

There are two components in this question:

- a) to identify and interpret the syllabuses according to their philosophies and intended practices of ELT
- b) to categorize syllabuses with similar ELT principles for subsequent analysis

From the documentary analysis from Chapter Four to Chapter Six, it has been acknowledged that the 1967 and 1976 syllabuses subscribe to the Oral-Structural Approach; the 1981 syllabus employs Communicative Language Teaching; the 1997 syllabus advocates the Target Oriented Curriculum in which Task-Based Language Teaching has a predominant authority over the philosophy, pedagogy and assessment of the TOC. Proponents of the English Language Teaching methodologies in foreign/second language learning research as well as key personnel who participated in the construction of the four syllabuses have been located. Furthermore, rationale of governmental, administrative, pragmatic and theoretically-driven incentives of syllabus and paradigm changes have been archived. What's more, it is also a timely moment to reflect on and analyze the past syllabuses so as to anticipate the forthcoming *Key Learning Area (KLA) English Language (P1-6) Subject Guide* (CDC, 2000) later in 2002:





**Figure 7.1 A timeline illustrating various primary English syllabuses accompanying their corresponding ELT methodologies**

By identifying, interpreting and categorizing all the primary English syllabuses as individual units as well as trends, RQ 1 provides a point of departure for establishment of a comprehensive and coherent framework to update the analysis of the English language curriculum of Hong Kong. RQ 1 leads us to a fuller understanding of the past and existing English syllabuses for primary schools and their renewals due to the theoretical motivations. As the primary English syllabuses have strategic significance over the English language schooling in Hong Kong, all the syllabuses have been examined to showcase the ever-changing challenges and dynamics in the field of ELT.

### 7.3 Research Question 2 (RQ 2)

*What are the theoretical assumptions and pedagogical features that characterize the ELT methodologies in the syllabuses?*

The question is divided into two parts:

- a) to heuristically explore the origins, theories of language and language learning of the particular ELT methodology
- b) to critically analyze the pedagogical features using an analytical framework

Having identified the ELT methodologies chronologically in RQ 1, RQ 2 endeavours to examine in detail the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the ELT methodologies as well as the origins of the syllabuses. To answer RQ 2, the analytical framework of Johnson (1977) has been devised to critically analyze the pedagogical features endorsed in various syllabuses. Evidence has been collected from interviews, curriculum documents such as syllabuses, and other historical accounts of the period from *The English Bulletin*. Importantly, RQ 2 has brought about the relationship, particularly on the level of theoretical orientations, between the ELT methodologies and the syllabuses. As illustrated, almost all syllabus change, except the 1976 syllabus, is informed by the sweeping change in terms of innovations in ELT methodology in different generations. Each English Language Teaching methodology has well-supported theories and their characteristics are summarized below:

Year of publication of syllabus	1967	1976	1981	1997
English Language Teaching methodology	Oral-Structural Approach		Communicative Language Teaching	Task-Based Language Teaching
Theory of Language	Speech as the basis of language		Language as communication	Language as a means of meaning making
Theory of Language Learning	Behaviourist habit-formation		Immersing in communicative situations	Learning through doing—tasks
Pedagogical Focus	Grammar and form		Function	Task

**Table 7.1 A brief summary of the theoretical and pedagogical characteristics of different ELT methodologies**

**7.4 Research Question 3 (RQ 3)**

*What are the impacts of ELT methodologies to the syllabus design?*

To investigate the intertwining relationship between syllabus type and different beliefs and practices of TEFL/TESL, it is crucial to investigate what ELT methodology constitutes the syllabus. Generally, the term *methodology* refers to “the systematic application of validated principles to practical contexts” (Brown, 1994, p. 74). The language teaching methodology is the theoretical rationale that underlies the syllabus design, materials development, and classroom teaching and learning. Conversely, as defined in Chapter One, a *syllabus* is a scheme of teaching contents that specifies the expected learning outcomes of pupils. Designing a syllabus can be a formidable task as there is always a need to “incorporate the latest theoretical and practical knowledge available” (Hok, 1981, p. 60). In this research, the relations between ELT methodologies and syllabus type is straightforward:



Year of publication of syllabus	1967	1976	1981	1997
English Language Teaching methodology	Oral-Structural Approach		Communicative Language Teaching	Task-Based Language Teaching
Syllabus Type / Curriculum	Structural syllabus		Notional/Functional syllabus	Target Oriented Curriculum

**Table 7.2     A summary of ELT methodologies and their associated syllabus and curriculum types**

Above all, dissimilar ELT methodologies can result in unlike syllabus design and format. From Table 7.2, the Oral-Structural Approach focuses on grammar and form, and thus the syllabus design would be a structural syllabus which specifies the grammatical contents of a language curriculum. Similarly, Communicative Language Teaching highlights the communicative needs and functions that learners may encounter. For this reason, “in a notional syllabus, both concept categories and functions form the focus of the syllabus” (Richards, 1980, p. 34). Examples of concepts include semantico-grammatical categories such as time, motion, frequency and duration; whilst functions consist of speech acts such as requesting, ordering, describing and informing. The 1981 syllabus is a typical example of a notional syllabus, as it comprises two inventories, listing discrete language items as well as communicative functions and uses of English. In the 1997 syllabus, tasks are given the most pedagogical emphasis which facilitates cross-curriculum work between subjects and disciplines. As a result, the corresponding curriculum framework is the Target Oriented Curriculum where flexibility is allowed through tasks.

## 7.5 Limitations of the Study

This study has merely attempted to focus on the theoretical as well as pedagogical aspects of the syllabus, and it does not concern the political and implementation issues. Because of the analytical and interpretative nature of this study and curriculum planning; and because the development in research of foreign/second language learning is hardly tranquil, the definitions of the language teaching methodology selected are subject to different interpretations depending on the theoretical stance. Above all, “research in second language acquisition and pedagogy almost always yields findings that are subject to interpretation rather than giving conclusive evidence” (Brown, 1994, p. 75).

One shortcoming has to be addressed because “a syllabus is not a teaching and learning experience, and therefore changing a syllabus does not and cannot in itself change what happens in classrooms” (Johnson, 1981, p. 42). However, no matter how good a syllabus is, a syllabus may perhaps sound beautiful in words and pay lip service to the teachers. All that a syllabus can do is to preach; it cannot teach. Here is a brief remark concerning the usage of syllabus to Interviewee F, a primary English teacher:

I didn't read the pages [syllabus] in detail because I am now teaching two primary two classes, even though I've prepared how and what to teach before I entered the classroom, the weaker class could not follow, owing to their abilities. I've to resolve to other methods. I've to make them listen to me first. But in the better class, they can learn really quickly, probably in ten minutes they learnt all the materials and then I can teach them more and give them difficult materials... (Appendix VI, p. 145)

We can communicate [in English] but in weaker classes, the pupils don't know what's going on and they even disrupt the classroom order. So, I have



to settle the pupils' discipline problems and then secondly, I can teach. Perhaps, it can be teacher's problem but I think if their minds are blank, how can they interact? (Appendix VI, p. 155)

The above experience may sound familiar to many teachers in Hong Kong. Depending on the classroom situation, the ELT methodologies proposed and addressed in the syllabus may not reflect the actual account and reality of foreign/second language learning in local classrooms.

At last, a brief disclaimer has to be stated here. Because of limited time and space, only the local primary English curriculum can be studied. As Hong Kong children officially start learning English in primary one, the primary English curriculum would be a good starting point to extend investigation to the secondary English curriculum as a coherent whole.

## **7.6 Implications and Recommendations**

The findings support that the government has managed to renew the English syllabuses promptly with updated and upgraded language teaching methodologies. What emerges from this study is that all the syllabuses and curriculum guidelines seem to promote an advancing picture of the English Language Teaching methodologies. Each innovation offers far more conducive and optimal learning conditions. It is also notable to see firm theoretical foundations in each stage of the ELT methodologies development. Johnson (1985) argues "the prerequisite for successful second language learning are strong motivation on the part of the learner, and sufficient exposure to the language in use" (p. 31). Actual teaching and learning situation in a classroom relies on the experience and attitudes of both



pupils and teachers. But a teacher-friendly syllabus can probably accelerate learning if presented nicely as a planned curriculum.

Implications are drawn from emergent trends in the documentary analysis of the syllabuses, and recommendations are made for further research in order to provide continuing support of syllabus reform and curriculum analysis. Caution has to be taken because “an incremental and interactive approach (based on cumulative knowledge and experiences) is thus advocated rather than a radical approach to initiating curriculum changes” (CDC, 2000, p. 8). That is to say, a progressive curriculum development and syllabus design with sound and thorough theoretical basis are desired. It is particularly useful for the coming KLA subject guideline. Interviewee B, a teacher educator, predicts that a fairly high degree of similarity between the TOC and KLA:

I have the impression that it'll still borrow quite largely on the kind of principals in the existing syllabus. But this syllabus and the possible future one provide a kind of consolidation, I think, of a kind of task-based and communicative principles. So, the sense of that is reasonably positive...I think that they should continue with similar approaches to what they have in the 1997 syllabus. That's certainly what I expect. I guess they might incorporate some ideas from the new reform, I'm not sure what. I guess they are thinking to modify this. The idea may be to modify this one a bit is to integrate a bit more with this one. That my feeling is that there is not so much in here specifically in English language related. I would expect they would continue because I think this reform actually integrates quite well with the TOC reform. It says creativity, motivation, and learning how to learn. These were TOC principles. (Appendix V, p. 135)

Withdrawing from language learning a bit and extending the scope to education in general, Hong Kong has always been presented to foreigners as a land of fusion between the Orient and the West. Anecdotal evidence abounds that

the English standard in Hong Kong is sliding. In this light, Hong Kong always looks for foreign models in the arena of foreign language education—English. More or less, the quest to pursue knowledge from the western traditions needs more consideration:

The core of the debate comes from the inside— through recollection (Plato), through the constructivist acts of the mind (Piaget)— or from the outside— through information received by our senses (Bacon), through meanings appropriated through participation in various practices (Vygotsky) etc. (Marton, 2000, pp. 287-288)

This thesis has encompassed the theoretical aspects of the planned English curriculum of Hong Kong primary schools and by straddling theory and practices, teachers' classroom practice can be enriched. That's why more extensive, longitudinal and continual research in foreign/second language curriculum is proposed. As a result of increasing intercultural communication and globalization, children and young language learners will always strive to be proficient multilingual speakers in the long run.

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Appendix I

Newspaper clipping

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## The decline and fall of the English language



### Two-thirds of Primary Six students below Primary Two level

**FULL STORY - PAGE A2**

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# 80pc of English students failing

Pupils at least two years behind, official study shows

By Michael Ng  
HongKong iMail

TESTS show the English-language standards of more than 80 per cent of Primary Six pupils are below Primary Four level, while two-thirds of them are below Primary Two standards, according to an Education Department study.

The department yesterday announced its preliminary findings after a pilot study on the English standards of 112 Primary Six pupils in four schools.

The study found that 86 per cent of Primary Six pupils failed to reach the Primary Four English textbook level after being tested, with 66 per cent below Primary Two standards.

The results showed the textbooks adopted by the schools were too difficult and affected the pupils' confidence, causing them to fail in their studies.

Department research officer Tsui Hon-kwong blamed the widespread use of the textbooks, the standards of which were higher than average, for the poor results.

"It was an unrealistic educational concept," he said.

"The local education system, parents and

schools should all bear the responsibility for the existence of this phenomenon, as they have neglected to consider the ability of their students while they were adopting their textbooks," Mr Tsui said.

Director of Education Matthew Cheung Kin-chung said his department had provided a set of guidelines to primary schools over the standard of textbooks to be used.

But he would not rule out the possibility that some schools had chosen additional English textbooks that had a higher standard than average, making it hard on pupils.

"Local primary schools had freedom over the selection of textbooks, but they should have followed our guidelines," Mr Cheung said.

But he said the study could not totally represent the present situation in all primary schools.

Mr Cheung said a pilot programme, in which pupils were grouped together on their English proficiency, was being conducted in six schools. The department would review its progress when the programme ended in June.

"We would then review whether local primary school students should study in the same class with regard to their proficiency

levels, rather than referring to their ages," he said.

Legislator Audrey Eu Yuet-mee was worried about the declining English standards.

"The declining quality of local English teachers was the prime reason for the drop," she said. "Also teachers do not have sufficient time for preparation before lessons, as well as an inconsistent education policy by the government, these elements also added to the woes."

Education-sector legislator Cheung Man-kwong said the study was insufficient to reflect the English standards of primary pupils.

The study results came after the University Grants Committee recently suggested campus students attend an English benchmark test before graduation.

Committee chairwoman Dr Alice Lam Lee Kiu-yue said it had yet to decide on the test format, but she said students should be confident. Chinese University Vice-Chancellor Arthur Li Kwok-cheung said the eight funded-tertiary institutions had established a joint committee to formulate a test format.

mck@hk-icmail.com

Editorial: Page A10



## Appendix II

### Semi-structured Interview Questions

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Duration: \_\_\_\_\_

Venue: \_\_\_\_\_

#### *Questions regarding the 1997 syllabus:*

1. What experience have you had in curriculum development? In your opinion, please describe what role should syllabuses assume in curriculum development?
2. To what extent do you make use of the syllabuses in your teaching? Do you follow the 1997 syllabuses? If not, what other guidelines do you rely on?
3. In your opinion, what are the purposes or functions of the “Syllabuses for Primary Schools, English (primary 1-6)?
4. Please summarize in a few words the general ideas of the TOC.
5. In your own words, explain the strengths and weaknesses of the TOC in teaching and learning English.
6. What are the ideas present in the TOC that you do not agree with and you think changes should be required?

### Appendix III

#### Profile of Interviewees

Interview /CD title	Interviewee	Profession/Domain	Years of Experience
A	A	Associate Professor at the Department of Curriculum and Educational Studies at HKU	> 15
B	B	Senior Lecturer at the Department of English at HKIEd	>12
C	C	Senior Instructor at the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at CUHK	>11
D	D	Vice principal & English panel of a local primary school	> 20
E	E	Primary school English teacher	> 1
F	F	Primary school English teacher	> 1
G	G	Two senior Curriculum Development Officers (English Section) from the Education Department	> 20

## Appendix IV

### Sample Transcript of Interview A

This interview was conducted in English.

**R** = Researcher

**I** = Interviewee

**R:** To kick off, let's start with...how do you think of the TOC approach in teaching English to primary pupils in Hong Kong in general?

**I:** Pedagogy?

**R:** Yes.

**I:** Ah...mmm, I think the pedagogy is appropriate in some regards. It's based on constructivist's view of learning and I think that it tunes with modern philosophy of how young children learn in general. However, I think at the same time, you mustn't go too far in pushing this, particularly in language learning. Because I think children also need well-structured input and I agree that task-based learning is a very powerful way of language learning. It's contextualized. It involves the children in producing language and processing language. It's got the potential to be more interesting and therefore, more motivating than other approaches. But I think the planned curriculum, or the designed curriculum of the TOC probably outlined a very strong version of task-based learning. You know from the work of Peter Scarino, there were weak and strong versions of the task-based learning whereas the strong version is very much holistic, contextualized, quite free, uncontrolled language use. Whereas the weak version has got a strong control of language. The context is not necessarily totally authentic. Now Hong Kong went through a very strong model. If you look at the curriculum plan of the task-based learning, it is very much the strong version of task-based learning. In that, it said, oh! Everything must have a real life context; must have a framework of thinking and doing, must have a holistic outcome or product and so on. So, it plays itself very firmly on the right hand side of the continuum. I think that maybe, it might be appropriate once the students reach P6 but the problem comes with P1 and P2 where the kids don't have that much language base in order to produce holistic language. And it would be quite difficult to think of realistic contexts where only a limited of language is needed, I mean. So there is a gap, I think, between the planned curriculum and what actually happen in the classrooms. I went to several schools where they were actually trying honestly to implement TOC, and they were saying, well, the major constraint is the lack of context that we can think of where the students can learn, use the language they have already learnt. Say, we can't have picnics every week 'cause there was one area where they could use the food, and making decision and so on. So that was the constraint. So, I think where



I would criticize the planned TOC was that it was a little bit inflexible in its view of what a task is.

**R:** Let me think. So, you are saying that the Hong Kong is trying to implement the strong version of the TOC approach but I have also received some criticisms from other people saying that TOC is only suitable for schoolchildren having English as a native language. It is not quite appropriate for context like Hong Kong where English is a foreign language or a second language to implement the TOC at the primary stage. Do you have anything to say about this?

**I:** I have a little bit of sympathy with that view. I don't fully accept it. I think that, I am not calling for a weak model of the task-based learning nor a strong model, I am calling for a more complete view of task-based learning to see that there is a time when a weak model is appropriate, provided that over time, you move towards the strong model. I see nothing wrong with starting off with a solid foundation in primary one, primary two and primary three where your emphasis is on vocabulary learning, and some structural learning and some function and notions, to learn discretely, you know, as individual items, and then contextualize. But over time, this becomes put together in more and more realistic situations. I don't accept the argument that Hong Kong is not a native language environment, therefore, we should reject task-based learning. I don't accept that. I think sensible adaptations of task-based learning would actually, well it does work, I have seen it working in Hong Kong schools. I have seen it working in primary schools. I have seen some excellent examples of highly motivated children using language, being confident and happy about using English. I would say that task-based learning potentially can be very successful.

**R:** Yes. Let's talk about something that you don't agree much on the TOC approach. You've said that the TOC is...I mean from our conversation up till now, I sense that you encourage the TOC and you supported it. What about anything else about the TOC that you don't agree much?

**I:** I didn't agree...this is more to do with the strategies for getting TOC into the school, the dissemination strategies. I don't know if that is the focus of your interest but I think the TOC was potentially a very good idea but very poorly presented. There were a number of mistakes. The initial framework for TOC was written in quite complex English and the translation was awful. The Chinese translation was virtually a word for word, a literal translation. And it didn't express ideas clearly. Teachers were immediately put off. They said, ouch, this is too complex. I think that as a training model, the idea of a 3-day workshop to introduce TOC and then a lack of continuing support was an initial mistake. I think it was too much a top-down model. I think it was a political mistake, you know, a lot of people would associate with designing TOC were expatriates and I think there should have been a much greater effort to include local teachers and



other educationalists in the design mechanism. So that would be an area which I would really criticize TOC. Not so much for the content of the syllabus but more for the way in which the whole package was presented and teacher training was an issue. Also, very often what we found was that the people in the Education Department who had the responsibility of running the teacher training themselves really didn't understand TOC.

**R:** Well, what do you mean?

**I:** They recruited some, a teacher training unit. They recruited some people to work in the ED and their job was to run the training programmes. But when teachers asked them detailed questions about assessment, how to assess TOC and so on, sometimes the teacher trainers say "I don't know", "I am not sure" or "I don't fully understand it myself either". So, there was a sense of lack of confidence from the teachers, even the ED people don't fully understand TOC.

**R:** Yes, I agree on that. The assessment or the assessment part was quite problematic. Do you think it is the same case now?

**I:** I think it will always be problematic until we have a very clear and coherent examination system and assessment throughout the whole schooling system in Hong Kong, including tertiary. As you know, washback is a very strong phenomenon and parents will always make a link, between even kindergarten and university. They see schooling is a through-train, leading their hope to university place. So how they select their kindergarten, their primary school and their secondary school. It is very often with their view to the continuation of the ladder of education. Now unless, we have a comprehensive change to our examination system in the public domain, until those changes come, we can't really change assessment practices in schools because teachers will always then face the dilemma. Do I go for formal testing in a traditional way or do I go for portfolio, other kinds of formative assessment. How should I do this? Because there is always dilemma between conflicting methods of assessment. Now, in TOC, they tried to avoid the issue. They postpone any public announcement on the P6. As the TOC got nearer and nearer to P6, eventually the government didn't make a firm decision. So, teachers in P4, P5, P6 were very worry in introducing TOC and they had the double assessment practices, traditional as well as the TOC kind of assessment, which just double everybody else's workload, including student's workload. Now having addressed, I think that so far there's been some movements in tinkering with the public exam system and the high stake assessment. But it's not been comprehensive enough. You still got the universities saying no, we want academic. OK, we bear in mind a little bit extracurricular and whole-person approaches, but we're really interested in the academic scores. That can always have a washback effect, so I still think the problem is there. I don't think it's been fully resolved. I think the P6 system is a bit better with the banding system



changing, that's another step in the right direction. So, it eases the little bit of the attention but there is still a number of contradictions in the public sectors. So, things are better but I don't think they are adequately addressed.

**R:** I see, so in terms of assessment, are there anything that the government or the curriculum planners can do to modify the guidelines presented so that there is a better way of assessment? Is there a way out to improve?

**I:** Well, they had the roles. You remember the research on the examination practices in Hong Kong which suggested a wider range of assessment practices. What we need is the government to work closely with the Examination Authority to come up with a clear statement. That is, to what assessment procedures look like? What is being assessed? How is it being assessed? Should support teachers in assessment procedures. It needs to give teachers a stronger sense of professionalism. At this moment, teachers prefer objective tests. They can say for dictation, for example, I'd take one mark off for every mistake. Pedagogically, that's nonsense. I mean, it is a deficit model, who's to say that one error is worth one percent, I mean, just doesn't really make sense. But, from the objective point of view, it is evident that they can show parents, look, 1,2,3,4,5,6, 12 mistakes, therefore, eighty eight out of a hundred. And parents can't argue. But what teachers are frightened of is making subjective decisions because they think parents might challenge them. Now, the government should really work strengthening the teacher's sense of professionalism so they can feel qualified to make subjective judgements. Maybe this involves having moderating procedures. Or groups of teachers working together decide on common grade and so on...

**R:** That's a good idea.

**I:** So I think that would be an area which would help teachers have more confidence in TOC style assessment.

**R:** Yes. Just now, we've talked about the one of the weaknesses of the TOC is the assessment, or one of the deficits in the TOC. Regarding the theoretical aspect of the TOC, is there any other weaknesses that the TOC in itself lacks? Or in the particular context of Hong Kong, what TOC couldn't offer?

**I:** Well, I do take the point that TOC would by and large, based on overseas models and overseas frameworks. However, that's not to say that they are inappropriate to Hong Kong. I think it could have been stronger, in this case, back to earlier point, is greater reference was made to current practices in Hong Kong. And how can you build on good practice? How can you address the particular concerns or problems in Hong Kong schools? One of them being the English language environment in Hong Kong. It's stronger than people think, you know, that's more English in Hong Kong than, for example, French in the United



Kingdom. You only have to, for example, there is lots of English on signposts, on advertising, on TV, on the radio, in the cinema, in the streets, in the newspaper, you know, if you look for it. But having said that, it's not totally an immersion in English language that you have here. Another aspect is things like class size, classroom architecture, the design of classrooms and the design of schools. They are quite restrictive in allowing movement. I would like to say a little bit more on teachers' beliefs about English being addressed. The teachers do have quite a strong view on the values of grammar teaching, for example. And what I think would have been better a better strategy would be to do it step by step rather than a great leap forward. I think a lot of people felt that the TOC was too big a swing from current practice and again, it was a strategy that was bad. It was basically saying what we did in the past was wrong, was rubbish. Here is what you should be doing. If you tell that to a teacher with twenty years experience, say sorry, you last twenty five years work was rubbish, this is what you should have been doing. They are going to disagree with you because they have a lot of professional intuition and a strong rationale for what they are doing. They have their personal views of teaching and there is always a bad strategy to present education reform in that way, the black versus white argument. I think it should have been, here's what you've doing. Here's what we think is excellent, in what you are currently doing. Here are some ideas to expand your range of teaching and it should be within their comfort. So teachers feel they are being valued and that they are being encouraged to develop. Now, that didn't happen with TOC. It was very much... current practices are wrong, not working, we need totally new, clean slate, write the board clean start again, fresh to paper approach. Now when we talked to some of the people in EMB and ED about it, they said the problem is to get government funding, you have to present this is an innovation. You won't get funding for saying this is an extension of current practice. You got to say we are solving a problem but the mistake is to present to teachers in the same way, to say that what you are doing in the past was wrong. So, that would be an area which I think was bad, in how they did this. Other aspects of TOC per se was... it was a little bit, at the earlier stages, it was a little bit unreasonable in terms of what they expected of teachers in terms of workload and the role of teachers. There was a time when they were talking about in getting rid of the textbooks. It was about 93. It said TOC will...you won't need a common, uniform textbooks, you will need materials tailored to meet the needs of every class.

**R:** That's why they have some graded readings.

**I:** Yes. What they envisaged was a kind of supermarket of materials where you would select to suit your own classroom but publishers weren't interested in that because it is very easy to photocopy and it doesn't look good. It is expensive to produce good quality things if you are only doing a small unit instead of a whole textbook. You need a good, strong markets for textbooks. And teachers were against it because it seemed to be suggesting teachers should take on more



materials development. And they felt they didn't have time for that. So that was another aspect where I think TOC was being pushed too strongly. And it should have a more pragmatic approach to the realistic situation, the textbook market in Hong Kong and also, the teachers' workload, and time constraints and so on.

**R:** It is quite interesting because I also read the syllabus published in 1981 which advocated the communicated approach and I also see that communicated approach is embedded in the present syllabus, the TOC. On the other hand, the teachers were...I am not sure whether the government was saying that what the teachers have done was totally wrong. So, there's quite not clear to me what actually was the problem?

**I:** I think what they felt was the problem is regarded to the communicative approach. The communicative approach is just the general philosophy of any teaching method which leads to children producing language, either written or spoken language. But people looked into the classrooms, they found teacher talk dominating. They didn't see much evidence of children actually using language in a communicative way. So, it was classroom practice rather than the old syllabus that they were criticizing. But the old syllabus had a weakness which I agree with and that is the way in which the communicative approach was initially interpreted in other countries as well as Hong Kong. That was the P-P-P approach which was, you have in your syllabus a list of structures, a list of vocabulary, a list of functions. And what textbook writers tended to do was take them one by one. Today's the present continuous tense and there are six ways of looking at the present continuous tense. Number one, practice, drill exercise. And then the teacher thinks of a weird context in which, maybe a strange dialogue or story where the present continuous tense comes in every line. Totally inauthentic. But that was still reckoned to be the communicative approach because it was looking at functions and notion, and language in use. The situation was so contrived and unrealistic. So, TOC in a sense, took it the other way. Instead of starting with an individual language item, you start off with a holistic situation and then you work out what the language items are needed for this situation. I agree with the criticisms of the old approach. It was quite dull. It was quite unrealistic, very hard to teach, very hard to think of realistic situations to practice individual language items in that way.

**R:** But is there anything wrong that is inherited in the communicative approach guideline in 1981? Or was that just the problem of the textbook publishers?

**I:** Well, I think it was the problem of the syllabus, the way the syllabus was organized in that it did divide things into individual sections. I remember rightly it listed things listening, speaking, reading and writing. Then it had the long lists of items to be covered. That, the way that's designed sent a message suggesting that you should cover all the items on these lists.

**R:** I see. Besides talking about the weaknesses of the TOC, do you have anything else to the weaknesses? We've talked about the assessment and perhaps the introduction of TOC to teachers and community....

**I:** Well, I don't think there was a clear indication to teachers as to what TOC looked like in a classroom. There were lots of nice theoretical models as to how it would help children learn but there was very little on pedagogical strategies. What is the TOC lesson? What it looked like? How do I teach in the TOC way? What kind of interaction I expected in the classroom? And so on, I mean. This is always been a complaint from teachers about syllabuses in Hong Kong. The Activity Approach, ended up with lots of disdain in circles but still teacher talk. And they had the disadvantage of some children with their back to the blackboard, having to turn around all the time to watch lesson. The Activity Approach wasn't actually taking place because the message that the teachers had got was that the Activity Approach means the children sitting in groups. Now, I see similar things happening now with task-based learning. The message that a lot of teachers are getting is tasks mean children do more work. That's the idea they are getting of task-based learning. There is no clear indication towards what task-based learning really is in a classroom setting.

**R:** So, they also have to modify the classroom setting.

**I:** I think that they need to be told that you can modify the setting but you don't have to. Task-based learning can be an individual. It doesn't have to be group work or pair work. It can be on an individual basis. But those kind of messages are not getting through as to what exactly task-based learning in TOC looks like in the classroom.

**R:** What about the strengths of the TOC?

**I:** I would say, it does concentrate on holistic communication. It does involve children actively in their learning. It's got great potential for cross-curriculum work in the topics, for the units and the modules. It can be about the rainforests, about space, about music, dancing, you know, you can go right across the curriculum and that's important because I think you learn English best by learning about other things. You don't learn best by concentrating on the grammar and concentrating on John and Mary going shopping. It is not to be interesting really, which it can be quite stimulating. And the other advantage I think is that it can motivate children, gives some more confidence and a greater interest. And that's what a lot of teachers in our research told us. After trying out TOC, they found the kids were more ready to speak out, were more confident, seemed to be more interested in learning.



**R:** So, what are the features that we are Hong Kong now having that can make the best use of TOC?

**I:** I think that Hong Kong has got certain advantages, which TOC would help. First of all, it fits in with other aspects of curriculum reform, which is the merging of the curriculum. I think that IT [information technology] can help TOC and schools are very actively pursuing IT. I think that Hong Kong has got a strong tourist industry, so there are lots of foreigners available for interaction. Go down to Tsim Sha Tsui and interview foreigners. As I said earlier, the media, in English available. I think that Hong Kong teachers actually, although the press and business community very often criticize them, I think that we do have some very high quality English teachers. They work hard. They prepare well. They got very good English themselves. I think there are lots of scopes there. If the teachers are given enough room by their schools, there are lots of innovations and I see that the last few years. There are some very good things happening in schools now where the school principals let go a little bit of control where the principals allow teachers some scope for experimentation and so on. I think that would help. Also, I think there has been a rise in overseas visits, school trips to Australia and Singapore and lots of other places which again can help English learning. Far more awareness that you can go outside Hong Kong to help children to learn their English. I think there are more and more opportunities on that nature. I think we are getting more... I am not sure whether the textbooks are getting better, to be honest. I am not convinced of that. But I think there is a general awareness of we don't have to do things that the way we always did them in the past. There are scopes for some new ideas. Keep the best from the past. We'll bring in some new ideas as well. So, I think there is a general acceptance of things could be done differently. There seems to be a willingness to change, so things are going positive.

**R:** Yes, thank you. I'm also aware that this year the government is going to publish another...they call it Key Learning Areas (KLA) guidelines, a book about how English language should be taught. So, from the strengths of the TOC, do you think TOC is still a way that we should look forward to?

**I:** I would...getting back to my earlier point, yes. But not in its strong form. TOC, task-based learning, in its weak form, in its medium form and in its strong form is a way ahead. It gives us the framework, gives us a target, gives us a sense of where we are going, of what kind of students we are trying to produce. So, it's always useful to know what kind of targets we have or subjected. I think TOC had the benefit of identifying quite clearly what kind of learning was expected of children. That was extremely useful and I'm glad to see that has being retained in the new syllabus. Clear statements of where we are going. Now, the problem is, a lot of teachers don't read the syllabus. For one research suggested as much as 95% of teachers don't read their relevant syllabus. So, there is a challenge there to get

teachers familiar with the syllabus. Until that happen ends, we still have a lot of floundering around. So, I would actually like to see some kind of... benchmark, that's the wrong word, but some kind of professional expectation that teachers read the syllabus, discuss the syllabus, be consulted about the syllabus and so on. So much more engagement between teachers and the syllabus and syllabus design, which needs to be in place.

**R:** Apart from this, I mean, teachers' expectation in curriculum development. What are the roles that teachers should assume themselves in curriculum planning or curriculum development as a whole, particularly to language teachers?

**I:** Well, I wouldn't like to say teachers should take total responsibility for producing the scheme of work, producing all materials and so on. I think that's unrealistic. I think teachers should be kind of moderators, critical selectors of suitable materials. They should be open to the range of materials that are available, not only from Hong Kong but from elsewhere. Lots of good stuff being produced in China now, which they have to look at. I think they should take responsibility for designing the general scheme of work but not necessarily the fine detail. Fine detail can be drawn from materials that they choose. There are lots of teaching schemes available around the world which they can access through the internet, which gives the details of precise skills, precise language items and so on that are being taught at specific time. So, I don't think they actually sit down and work out that all amount of detail. So, I think they are responsible for a general scheme of work, selection of materials. They are also responsible for sharing more, for pedagogical discussion. Now some schools where I really saw things working well. They rearranged the staff room so all English teachers all sat with each other. They rearranged the timetable so they had free periods at the same time. So they could sit down and talk professionally about issue. One school was using school fund to buy in some classroom assistants or some supply teachers. So all English teachers have one afternoon a week free to sit down and do professional planning.

**R:** It sounds good.

**I:** That supports the principal, could and I think should give to curriculum reform. Curriculum reform never works, if I say to you, I have got a wonderful idea which would really improve your teaching. I would take you an extra two hours a day to do but never mind, it would really make your work better. You are not going to say "Oh! Great! I'm very happy to work two more hours a day." But if I said, "Here's a way to improve your teaching. No extra cost to your time and effort." You're going to say ok, I'll try. Now TOC came in with another message saying, it's great this but you have to in your spare time. You have to do more preparation. You have to do more resource development. But never mind, it's going to be wonderful. So, I mean, that's not going to encourage teachers to take it on.



**R:** Yes, I see your point. That's all the questions what I've got to ask. Do you have anything else to add to our conversation?

**I:** In Hong Kong particularly, I think we have a disconnection. If you compare curriculum development in China, for instance, with curriculum development in Hong Kong, you'll find that China is much more comprehensive in their piloting. You know in Hong Kong, textbooks may not be piloted. They are not allowed to be piloted because of the commercial aspect. ED is worried about it gives a commercial advantage to publishers. In China, they pilot textbooks for three years for the national textbooks before it actually adopted. So, they have chances to try it out and revise it and improve it. The syllabus is devised through consultation with Chinese experts in big universities, overseas consultants, grassroots teachers in the big cities, in the provincial cities and in the villages. They have the tremendous system of soliciting feedback and ideas from the grassroots. They have experimental schools, reporting directly to Beijing to the ministry to say, you know, we're trying this experiment and it works. So, they put it in the new syllabus. They have a very comprehensive and very thorough system of curriculum development. In Hong Kong, we have a group of people, mainly in their spare time, sitting down at five o'clock in the evening and sharing their ideas. It's quite amateurish.

**R:** OK, I think that's all for today's interview and I really show my sincere gratitude to you.

**I:** Oh, you're welcome. Good luck with your studies.

**R:** Thanks!

## Appendix V

### Sample Transcript of Interview B

The interview was conducted in English.

**R** = Researcher

**I** = Interviewee

**R:** OK, let's start the interview. I would like to ask for your opinions on the TOC in teaching English as a foreign language in Hong Kong, in general, to primary children.

**I:** Right, I think that the key to the TOC approach in my view is the concept of tasks. The idea that the students will put the language into use. They will be actively involved in the lessons. To me, that's really the key thing. And I see the tasks as very much building in the Communicative Approaches. Because I think the way that task is used in Hong Kong is very much similar to the production stage of the Communicative Approach. If you remember TOC, we sometimes call it the P-P-P, presentation-practice-production. I think actually tasks are very much the production stage of Communicative Approach. So maybe some theorists, particularly from other countries, they might say really we are not doing tasks in Hong Kong, which is doing the production stage of the Communicative Approach. So, I think I see basically the task element following from the Communicative Approach and that being the central component of TOC for the classroom. The target I see more is something to do with the planning and the preparation. I think in the actual classroom teaching, the targets, according to my research and information, they will influence the teachers so much. It's more trying to get the students to do the tasks in the classrooms.

**R:** Yes, let me tell you one thing. I've received some feedback from some other people and they told me that the TOC may not be that suitable for the Hong Kong context because they think task-based approach and task-based learning would be more appropriate if English is learnt as a native language or as a first language rather than foreign or a second language in Hong Kong. Do you have anything to comment on this?

**I:** Mmmm...I don't entirely agree with that view point. I think in the Hong Kong context, the students need the opportunity to use the language in class because actually outside the class, they have no opportunity really. Maybe, they got the Filipino maid, not much opportunity, so to me, it is essential in the Hong Kong context. English basically is a foreign language in my view. It is essential you give them opportunity to speak in class. Because if they don't speak in class, they will never speak it. And I think we know from most of the research on language that you have to use the language and speak it. If you just listen to the teacher,



you're not really going to learn the language through that way. You have got to communicate some meaning. I think you know my article, the one about the cultural appropriateness in a language curriculum. There I kind of explored that issue and certainly, you can say that in Hong Kong, teachers tend to have a traditional emphasis in their teaching. The teachers standing in the front, doing quite a lot of teacher-centred teaching. We have generally a focus on grammar over the last twenty years. We have got exams that usually focus on reading and writing, pencil-and-paper kind of test. So, that's a bit of challenge to teachers. They've maybe got to adapt their method somewhat, particularly the older teachers. But I think there are many younger teachers, for example, in my article in *System* in 1998, where I talked about one young teacher, and very well-trained teacher, very creative and acute teacher. As for her, the TOC approach is very suitable because that was the kind of approach she was adopting before TOC. So, actually TOC was just the way to legitimize and encourage her to continue in that way. And I think there are many teachers like that. Probably, there are more teachers who are traditional. I think it's quite difficult to generalize across all the teachers in Hong Kong. I think the one who are younger and have training in English. They tend to be adopting communicative, task-based TOC approach, I think they are quite happy doing it. Most of the graduates of HKIEd [Hong Kong Institute of Education] in the last five years were people who had done in-service courses in IEd. But then you have got the influence of beliefs of the teachers, I think we all have our belief and there are many teachers for good reasons to have certain beliefs and they would try to carry out those beliefs when they are teaching. So, I think the issue is quite complicated and there are arguments from both sides. And I think in that 1999 article in language-culture curricula, I've tried to give a balanced discussion and showed yes, there are factors that seemed to help these approaches but there are other factors that seemed to hinder them. And I think we see that in the implementation in the schools that some teachers and some schools implementing to quite a high degree and some implementing to a low degree. It seems to me that the better the understanding that the teachers have of the curriculum, the better they are to implement it. So sometimes, the teachers say well, I don't like this approach or it doesn't work. And it maybe they don't understand it and they actually never tried it out. So I think there are lots of complex issues.

**R:** Yes, I also agree that teachers are the implementers of the approach. So, in your opinion, what roles do teachers have to assume themselves in, I mean, when during the process of curriculum development?

**I:** Right, I think you have to go through a number of stages. I think the first stage is try to understand what the new curriculum is about. Often, they have seminars and Education Department workshops. But these are often quite short duration, often in a rush. I think that's the initial stage, getting some information, seminars or reading the booklets, or looking at. Then you start to try to understand what the

curriculum or syllabus is about. Maybe you're discussing with your colleagues. You are beginning to get a preliminary awareness and then maybe you go through the next stage of trying out the syllabus or the curriculum in your classroom and then maybe reflecting a little bit, maybe getting more information. So I think it's a kind of process of finding out, and understanding, trying out, experimenting and then hopefully, getting a deeper understanding, maybe getting some advice or support from people at the Education Department or HKIEd. Even then doing further study and getting deeper understanding of the issue.

**R:** Yes, besides teachers readiness to implement the approach, do you think Hong Kong was ready or is not yet to be ready to fully implement the TOC?

**I:** I think not yet ready to fully implement it. But having said that, I think that's the case with all changes and innovations in all countries of the world. If you look at the literature, usually it's difficult to implement the change. You know, even we think about our daily life, if you want to persuade your mother, your father, or grandfather to do something in a different way of what they have done for many years. Very difficult. Even me or you, I think we have our favourite approach to life and, teaching and education and it's not easy to make fundamental changes, so I think we should be very aware that there's always a limitation to match the change you can make. But when you have that limitation, if a proposed change leads to 10% change, or 20% or 30%, that could be something quite positive. I think we should never expect a reform or a new syllabus or a new curriculum to make a sudden and long-lasting change. It's always a gradual change and again, if you think about our daily life, imagine you try a new food, first time you try it, maybe the first time you are a bit suspicious and then you think oh it wasn't bad, and then you try it again. These changes take time and I think historically, one of the mistakes in Hong Kong is to bring change too often. Sometimes, they had reforms like, you know, the Activity Approach, and school-based management, and IT, so many of these reforms coming in so quickly. And then we had TOC and now it seems TOC is not in priority. We have got a new educational reform and often the teachers, they become confused. If they ask: What's the difference between the communicative and task-based? What is the similarity communicative and task-based and TOC? Why is TOC abandoned? What is the relationship between the new reform and TOC? The government usually doesn't explain these kind of issues and I think it can be quite confusing and sometimes, discouraging for teachers. If they like TOC and they feel they are doing quite well, and there is another change, changes always increase workload. So again, quite a lot of complex issues. I think TOC has led some change and I think that the changes have been more positive than negative. I think the people who feel that TOC has not been successful, perhaps they got a slightly naïve view of change. They perhaps imagine that in an ideal world and everybody will change and will lead to success but all the changes in all the countries take nearly partial change in a partial implementation.



**R:** Let's talk about the weaknesses of the TOC. So far, can you just name a few weaknesses of the TOC?

**I:** I think...perhaps I should say first, I think I have discussed that in the 1997 article in the international review of education and it's also reprinted in that book by Simpson and Morris. And if you know his book, it's very good and very up-to-date. To me, the main weakness in TOC, is the assessment. I think that isn't well integrated into the teaching. The recording and reporting that was done. There was a lot of filling in forms and the teachers spent a lot of workload time on that. And that seems perhaps no benefit for the students, no benefit for the teachers, seems to be a lot of bureaucratic paper work. To me, that was the worst thing. If you look at the original framework for TOC, if you know the class framework. If you look at that document, it doesn't say to do a lot of reporting and recording, so it seemed that was perhaps a kind of idea that came from another working group of Education Department policy. But in the research we did, if you know the report. This was a report done by a group of HKIEd colleagues. I was involved in that one, we were quite pretty collaborated the assessments that it worked out. And I'm sure you know the other, Morris set out in 1996. This was done by the scholars from HKU. They found a fairly similar conclusion. So, assessment is one and that was the issue the teachers at schools they dislike the most. And I think that was also discussed in Adamson et al book. In the beginning of the TOC, I think it was too rush and if you remember the TTRA stage, it seemed to be not so successful. There's always a problem sometimes with kind of the top-down reform when it seems the government is telling the teachers what should do. But that's somewhat inevitable, I think. I think the resource for TOC was quite good. Sometimes, teachers will complain there is not enough resources but I think there was a lot of resources and quite a lot of money went into TOC. That thing was really positive. I think that teachers need quite a lot of support to carry out the change, it's ok to have a seminar but you need a bit of follow-up. I think they need more school-based, somebody who can demonstrate a lesson and teach with them and advise with them. But that's very expensive to do and difficult. I think in comparison with other reforms in Hong Kong, TOC had quite a lot of support.

**R:** What about the pedagogy of TOC? Is there anything which is not very appropriate to primary pupils at that level?

**I:** To be honest, Clark is mainly a secondary person, I think there was perhaps not enough primary specialists involved in the TOC. When it started, it was very much intended for the whole-age range, in other words, all the primary and all the secondary. But I think it's still has good potential for primary because in some ways, the primary students, they need the motivation and the activities, so I think it is reasonably suitable.



**R:** What about the strengths of the TOC?

**I:** I think I've just mentioned a couple of them before. I think the resourcing was generally good. The degree of support was reasonably good. The time period was quite well sustained if we think that TTRA and TOC were being developed in the early 1990s, that is in 91, 92 and 93, and then I think TOC was still quite at the forefront in 96 and 97, I think it was more sort of 98 that started. So, that's around seven or eight years, of quite high-profile, which is quite good in comparison with some other reforms. In the other book, it described a good chapter by Morris, he kind of traced the stages and he sort of said well, this period was kind of the heyday of TOC and then it started to faint in the year of 98, 99. Another quite good thing is that we have the TOC principles enshrined in the 1997 syllabus. As you observed in the introduction, they don't change the syllabus very often. So, we have basically the TOC syllabus and we are still in 2002. It's likely to be the syllabus for, I guess, eight years. Although in the syllabus, they are not emphasizing the term, TOC, in the sense they consolidated those concepts into the syllabus.

**R:** You mean the KLA?

**I:** No, what I am referring to is the 1997 English language syllabus. It's very a TOC syllabus but now they are developing a new syllabus to go with the Key Learning Areas?

**R:** Yes.

**I:** Is that going to come out in...

**R:** It should be soon. Right, because I also talked to government officials from the CDC and they told me that it should be out this year.

**I:** For primary or secondary?

**R:** For primary first.

**I:** Oh, I see. But I have the impression that it'll still borrow quite largely on the kind of principals in the existing syllabus. But this syllabus and the possible future one provide a kind of consolidation, I think, of a kind of task-based and communicative principles. So, the sense of that is reasonably positive. In this report that Morris set out, they talked about positive organizational change in that the TOC often encourage teachers to work other more, collaborate more. I think there are also some positive aspects for the pupil motivation. I think pupils enjoy the lessons more. I think they use more English. I think those are probably the main positive outcomes and I think also, to encourage the more communicative



teachers. Maybe 8 or 10 years ago, a teacher who was being communicative was actually following the 1981 syllabus maybe somewhat isolated because the other teachers would teach in the traditional way. And then the TOC serves to legitimize and authenticate these kind of approaches. In fact, that's quite positive, I think. Teachers need reward or encouragement. So I think TOC in the successful schools provided encouragement for teachers who are trying out the more progressive approaches.

**R:** Having talked the weaknesses and the strengths of the TOC, and we too know that there is a new KLA guideline coming out for the English language subject. So, I would like to have your opinion on whether TOC should be the way forward or we should think of something else?

**I:** I think that they should continue with similar approaches to what they have in the 1997 syllabus. That's certainly what I expect. I guess they might incorporate some ideas from the new reform, I'm not sure what. I guess they are thinking to modify this. The idea may be to modify this one a bit is to integrate a bit more with this one. That my feeling is that there is not so much in here specifically in English language related. I would expect they would continue because I think this reform actually integrates quite well with the TOC reform. It says creativity, motivation, and learning how to learn. These were TOC principles. To be honest, I think a lot of ideas behind the current reform is somewhat political in nature. After 1997, we have a change of government, a change of sovereignty. TOC is the old pre-1997 idea, so we must have a new idea to show that we are a fresh government and we have got ideas. But actually, they have duplicated many of the ideas. And that's correct because TOC is just based on general, good principles of teaching and learning, so I think we should expect those principles, whether you call it TOC or learning how to learn, task-based. I think the principles are similar, make students active, help them to help themselves, teach them study skills. Maybe there is one thing we may expect to see more in the new syllabuses the concept of assessment for learning, instead of just the idea of assessment being summative, just mark the grades. Using assessment in a formative way to help the students to learn more, so maybe that's something that might be emphasized. But I would expect to see quite a high degree of continuity between the 1997 syllabus and the new one that arrives. And I think these ideas are gradually beginning to take root. As I said earlier, it takes time to change. You expect really a 10 years period to make any substantial changes. Things are gradually moving on and I believe, in the right direction.

**R:** That's good. And also, I would also like to have your opinions on some ideas presented by the TOC that you don't agree with and you think changes are needed. Is there anything like that?

**I:** In terms of the concept, I didn't have too many problems with the TOC



concepts. The idea of graded worksheets was sometimes proposed, you know, one of the ideas was to cater better for the individual learners' difference. And the ED seems to quite like the idea with these graded worksheets, so you have the thing like the sun, the moon and the star, 3 different worksheets. In my teaching life, I've actually never done that kind of thing. Many teachers told me they found it very troublesome and also there is concern that you may be labeling the students. You use that sun, moon and star if they don't realize which is a high frequency but they could see it quickly, just seems to make the classroom management quite complicated. So that I was something that personally I didn't agree with very much. I mentioned the recording and reporting of the assessment results. That was the main thing that I was against. I think the assessment should be used to fit in the teaching and learning not for the purpose of record keeping. So I didn't agree with that one. Those are the two main things that I can think of that I was not so enthusiastic with that. But generally, I like the TOC ideas very much because it very much comes from the communicative background that I was trying in fifteen or twenty years ago. So, it suited my philosophy and my beliefs and I think I mentioned this earlier. If it suited the teachers' beliefs, it goes well. If it goes contrary to the teachers' beliefs, then you got the conflict that is difficult to resolve.

**R:** Could you mind telling me a bit more the difference between the communicative approach in the 1981 syllabus and the TOC initiatives in the 1997 syllabus?

**I:** Yes, this is quite a difficult issue. Mmm....as I remember, I had discussions on this. It was something that many of us found quite difficult because sometimes teachers would ask this question when we were doing training and seminars. Yes,...can I leave that question. I've got something written on my computer and I can find it later.

**R:** Sure, sure. Take your time. Basically, I've finished all the questions and perhaps, I can ask one more follow-up questions about the assessment. Many teachers may find the assessment procedures problematic and troublesome during classroom teaching. I'm also aware of that they have some graded exercises and graded readings, as you have talked about. And I'm interested in how teachers can really solve the problem....I'd say it is a problem because you have to extra time and effort in allocating the different exercises to students of different abilities, and you have, perhaps a different marking scheme for that. So, altogether, I think...I really don't know what teachers can do and what the government officials can suggest in the new guidelines this year about the assessment part, if they really want to pursue the TOC approach more fully?

**I:** Maybe they would say that worrying so much about the marking scheme and the grades is not so important, what's more important is that students can learn



something, they can get some useful feedback. To me, one of the problems in Hong Kong is that we have too much marking and too much sort of grades and numbers and scores and dictation with no percent or 100 percent or 50 percent. I think this wastes a lot of time of the teachers. I think it's discouraging to the students who get the low marks. I think focus more on the learning rather than always assessing and always giving marks. It's part of the Hong Kong school cultures to give a lot of those marks. But I think in primary school, it's discouraging to the students. Students find this difficult. Of course it's difficult to learn a foreign language where there's no support outside the class. The teachers sometimes are not so good in English, many problems. So, if you make it sort of a boring, troublesome subject with lots of low marks. It's natural, isn't it? If your teacher tells you, and you are weak, you got low percent. Of course you will not try. Take it for subject like English when we want you to speak. If you get discouraged, you won't speak it. I think try to get away from so much emphasis on the mark.

**I:** What I have said is that task-based approaches as presented in Hong Kong are very close to the orientations of communicative language teaching. They are very similar. But I think I once had an idea though one was larger than the other. One was like a general term and the other one was specific example. I can't quite remember what way it was. And I'm not sure that was convincing. But is it the Communicative Approach a general term? And then you could have a task-based approach as the example of the communicative. And somebody once said to me that if communicative is the general, you could have a task-based or a negotiative syllabus, and maybe some other kind of syllabus. So that was an idea but I'm not sure.

**R:** I see.

**I:** But that was very difficult to find anything in literature or in these kind of documents. But it would be a good question to ask to the ED people like a senior English language subject officer that should be able to give you their views. I think it's quite a difficult issue. I've talked about it with a few people but it seemed that we had quite different viewpoints. Some overseas people suggested to me that we should call it task-based teaching or task-based instruction while in Hong Kong, they usually call it task-based learning. But I think really what we are doing are task-based teaching because it's the teacher who is teaching through the task. It's only a small distinction.

**R:** Are you saying that the students are not learning in the...

**I:** Well, difficult to say. I think usually when they call it task-based learning in other countries, I think it's more open. You know, maybe they are given a task to do and then they use the raw resources. But what I mean is that you don't actually

teach them the language, they have to work out the language. Of course, it is not so suitable for Hong Kong where you have got only young kids without that much language resources, compared with adults. You know, like say, you're teaching in London, and you have like some foreigners like Spanish, Italian, Greece, Japanese, many different countries. They all have such different language resources. So you give them a task and then they use their existing knowledge and trying to extend it. Because I think if you look at the literature on tasks, much of it is on adults in other countries. Once you have a mixture of different nationalities, you can work much better because they are not likely to go back to their own language, they have to use the language to communicate. Of course, in Hong Kong with those young kids, they will tend to use Chinese a lot. Yes. With the issue of the communicative and task-based, I think it is difficult to say.

**R:** OK. That's all for the interview. And do you have anything else to add to our conversation?

**I:** Not really. Good luck for your study.

**R:** Thanks for accepting my interview. Thanks a lot.



## Appendix VI

### Sample Transcript of Interview F

This interview was conducted originally in Cantonese and was translated to English.

**R** = Researcher                      **I** = Interviewee

**R:** Let's begin. How long have you been teaching?

**I:** I have started teaching since September 2001, and till now which is Jan 2002, around four to five months in teaching English. My main duty is to teach primary two and primary five. I am now teaching two classes in primary two and altogether three classes of English. I've got a good class and one bad class in primary two, and a good class in primary five.

**R:** Could you tell me which banding does the primary school that you are teaching at belong to, roughly speaking?

**I:** Banding... earlier in November, the Education Department sent a team of Advisory Inspectorate to check our school. They stayed at our school for a week and they monitored the whole school, a kind of inspection. And they classified in the report that our school is called a "moving school"...

**R:** What do you mean [by moving school]?

**I:** Improvements needed, I think because the feedbacks that we received were not very good and we have got lots to improve. I don't know much about the banding of primary schools, five or three, but in my opinion, I will give it a banding of three in a scale of five. [1 is the best whereas 5 is the worst]. I think it is below average, yes, I think so.

**R:** As you have said you've been teaching for over four months, and you've not received any kind of "formal teaching training" at all. So, I'd like to know more about your understanding towards the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) [English] syllabus which was published in 1997?

**I:** I know it is like a textbook per term and each chapter [in the textbook] would divide into....no, I mean, there would be three dimensions: Knowledge, experience and interpersonal. For example, eight or nine chapters would be divided into two or three modules and each module has a theme. And each theme, not every chapter can cope with all the three dimensions but usually, it is explicitly stated that each chapter teaches the knowledge dimension or knowledge

dimension, for instance. Within each chapter, there is a main task because a target is set for teachers to teach. Apart from the chapters as units, modules also have targets. Namely, after teaching four units, students are expected to learn more about school, home and community. That's my understanding [of the TOC].

**R:** So, you realized the structure of the TOC as some clearly stated targets and....

**I:** And also from primary one to primary six, there are bandings, for example, primary one is usually stage one and primary two is often stages one and two. Then primary three and four are perhaps stage three and up to primary five is stage four. And primary six is stages five and six. There are probably six to seven stages. My understanding is that six years of primary schooling from primary one to six, pupils will progress towards the next stages and there are improvements. So, whenever I set the exam paper, I always check the curriculum demand and thus set the paper.

**R:** I've got a question. For the TOC, there is a representative assessment scheme that is not solely product-oriented or simply looking at the test results. But in daily classroom learning, it requires continuous observation of pupils' behaviour in order to assess their performance. I'd like to know how you execute the assessment procedures during your classroom teaching?

**I:** You mean spoken, written or what? There are several aspects...

**R:** Yes, there are several aspects and how would you assess individual learning outcomes of your pupils? How to track their improvements?

**I:** In fact, at our school, we do not follow the entire [TOC] framework. We adopt the textbooks, workbooks, and we make worksheets for our pupils from other materials. There is a booklet, I remember, of pre-task activities. And also there is a grammar practice book which we do not adopt. Often, we extract some materials from the pre-task booklet and prepare worksheets, 4 pages for each chapter, for example. It is because we don't have enough time to do all [exercises], and we just select what we believe our pupils can have the ability to do. And we give good class one more sheet to do while the worse class does only four. In writing, comprehension and listening, there are tests and exams [to monitor the progress]. For speaking, we observe their daily oral skills. Basically, there is a speaking assessment for each chapter and each pupil has to go through four assessments in a term and by midterm exam, they will already have two. Teachers can select various chapters or texts to test. There are various ways to conduct the test. They can do it all at once by asking pupils to have their speaking test on chapter one, and when finishing chapter three, the teachers can do the test again. Then, there are two results of oral tests and we calculate the average of the two. Or the other method is by observation during class, but you have to instantly jot down the



grades. In all, there are two grades for half of the term and we take the average afterwards.

**R:** For speaking assessment, do teachers in your school have the assessment scheme for you to follow?

**I:** We have that in our teaching schedule. For example, we use the ask-and-answer mode. If there are only one to two mistakes, then we give the pupils an A and so on. We will just focus on the grammar and we turn a blind eye on pronunciation. We won't judge the correctness of pronunciation. This is one weakness. Like missing a /s/ sound can be a deviation, for instance.

**R:** Does that mean that your school focuses more on accuracy rather than fluency? Can I say this?

**I:** Right, right.

**R:** Especially on the speaking part?

**I:** Yes.

**R:** Would the treatment, I mean the assessment be the same for both the primary five and primary two pupils?

**I:** More or less similar but of course there is a difference in terms of level of difficulty.

**R:** What about the guidelines in the [English] syllabus, it introduces some methods for teaching and did you try to follow them at all?

**I:** No, I didn't read the pages in detail because I am now teaching two primary two classes, even though I've prepared how and what to teach before I entered the classroom, the weaker class could not follow, owing to their abilities. I've to resolve to other methods. I've to make them listen to me first. But in the better class, they can learn really quickly, probably in ten minutes they learnt all the materials and then I can teach them more and give them difficult materials. For example, during my preparation, I can prepare two more new words to teach.

**R:** For ordinary primary five pupils, how many words do you usually teach them in a lesson?

**I:** Not every lessons. For example, take a chapter as a unit, I have to teach six new words and then we teach the [grammatical] structure and then followed by reading activities. Finally, there are some tasks. That's why we won't have vocabulary



for each lesson. Often, pupils will do the penmanship of new words once we have introduced the words for each new chapter or text.

**R:** Do you think that vocabulary learning is integrated into teaching of other English skills?

**I:** Yes, we do. Because it [vocabulary] cannot be detached from English. In reading activities, there will also be some new words.

**R:** Do you mind telling me the medium of instruction that you use in classroom? Is it Cantonese or English?

**I:** I know that the Education Department requires us to use English as early as primary one and the English panel at my school also says that I must use English and that's why I use English. At the beginning I used English, and teaching primary five pupils gave me a more vivid memory. It is because I assumed that primary five pupils should be able to understand in English, and I used English since the beginning of the term. What turned out is that they couldn't understand and they all stared at me and not knowing what to do. I spoke so slowly already and then I turned to Cantonese to explain. They're better right now, after a few months and they can understand simple instructions, for example, "you may check the answers". They are mostly classroom language. But if I explain the meanings of English words in English, they can't understand. I think it's because they knew too few words, particularly some abstract words. I can use gestures to describe and the last time when I taught the word "peace" in a chapter called "A peace road". I asked them whether they know the meaning of peace and they certainly didn't know. Then, I could only think of words like pigeons, harmony and words unfamiliar to them. I'm not sure whether my words are too difficult for them or not. And then I finally say "peace" in Cantonese and they all understood right away.

**R:** Would it be more difficult if the word is abstract in nature and if the word can be illustrated by tangible objects, would it be less troublesome?

**I:** Right....no problems for concrete words.

**R:** So, in your opinion regarding the TOC syllabus, what do you think are feasible suggestions that can be applied in classroom teaching? Are there any suggestions that you find in the syllabus that you cannot go after no matter what you do?

**I:** For example, there is a chapter teaching how to write letters, including invitation cards and they are useful. The last time I taught them writing a letter, I told my pupils to write me an email as a homework assignment. They indeed found it interesting. What they have to learn is to recognize how to address



people properly in the letter, namely the phrases “Dear Miss Tsui”, “Yours sincerely” and “Yours faithfully”. I told my pupils that there should be opening and concluding phrases like these and it was up to them what the contents were. And during class that day, there was a grasshopper and they shouted in the classroom. I also told them they could write about it. Some really wrote about the grasshopper and others wrote their personal messages to me. So, they could practice what they learnt in class. I believe the interaction between the pupils and the teacher can be improved as well. This incident is a memorable one so far.

**R:** What about the suggestions from the TOC syllabus that you don’t agree with?

**I:** I think, for example, the introduction of poems and lyrics to primary one, and two pupils. Well, I am not sure about primary one but for primary two and five, pupils are expected to learn them. The last time when I talked about weather in my primary five class and ... for instance, “autumn winter makes me happy, cool winds blowing, warm sun shining...” But pupils are expected to compose one and they are generally given all the words and the whole framework. I don’t think they are creative at all, perhaps they knew too few words and it’s difficult for them to do creative writing [in the target language]. It’s a good idea to teach poems but the syllabus doesn’t suggest teaching poems appreciation. I just want to say, not sure if it’s too advanced, there should not be any format and rule to the poems and the rhyme scheme, the message I got from my panel chair is that the emphasis should not be this but just the words in the poem. And that poem doesn’t rhyme at all. I agree that the concept of teaching poems is good but it does not appear useful. Presumably, the pupils cannot remember that they have learnt poems before.

**R:** As a teacher, what do you think about roles or the purposes of the government-initiated syllabus, particularly the 1997 syllabus?

**I:** I think it should be a signal for the school, a reference and it isn’t necessary for us to follow rigidly. It is because every school belongs to different banding but we need to identify the main direction. For example, we append literature as complementary in teaching English. All the major directions must be clear but the details whether the pupils can or cannot learn is another subject matter. Take literature as an example, I really don’t know how much are taken from literature.

**R:** Can you be more specific of what types of literature do you refer to?

**I:** I don’t know but they [the syllabus] used the word “literature” but the textbooks are published by Longman, for example. They are the work of the publishers and the textbook writers...mmmm...one strange thing about Longman is that they like to use abbreviations and short forms, perhaps they do this because it would be more informal for pupils to communicate in English in daily conversation, like

“what’s your name?” instead of “what is your name?”. Then we need to take extra time to teach pupils that “what’s” equals “what is”. I used to learn “what is” when I was small. But textbooks now use “what’s”.

**R:** Can you briefly describe the advantages and disadvantages of the TOC [English] syllabus?

**I:** The advantage is that all the texts are linked together. In primary two, pupils learn about the schools, teacher’s desk, a TV, a bin. And in chapter one, pupils learn about “my school”, music room, art room, floors and so on. And in chapter two, pupils learn about “my classroom”, cupboard and things inside the classroom. Because pupils often keep in touch with their schools and homes, they can learn vocabulary. In chapter three, they learn about “my home”, clauses like “I sweep the floor” and “I make the bed”. They therefore learn more about housework, for example. These are good for them and it’s more coherent.

**R:** Is it like building a task around a theme or a situation?

**I:** Yes, exactly.

**R:** What about the disadvantages?

**I:** Wait...let me think.

**R:** In what ways do you think the TOC requires improvement?

**I:** I think it’s a bit too easy. Pupils often memorize the words and they cannot truly communicate with you. For the less able pupils, they cannot respond to your questions in you ask them in English. I’m thinking whether there’s a problem with the curriculum or something with the pupil’s ability, or it is the teacher’s responsibility?

**R:** To the best of my knowledge, the TOC also suggested a communicative approach. In fact, the 1981 syllabus also suggested the communicative approach, in which the classroom interaction should be more communicative, pupils given opportunities to speak in English meaningfully and practice other skills...

**I:** Yes, it’s true in my good class. We can communicate [in English] but in weaker classes, the pupils don’t know what’s going on and they even disrupt the classroom order. So, I have to settle the pupils’ discipline problems and then secondly, I can teach. Perhaps, it can be teacher’s problem but I think if their minds are blank, how can they interact? So, pupils need put effort to memorize words, even for the better class. Pupils in weaker class are just lazy, I think. I always hear from others that we should not require pupils to memorize and



dictate.... but I mean pupils need training and practice before they can speak the language, perhaps something wrong with the pedagogy.

**R:** Do you think it can be attributed to the syllabus in the sense that it is too idealistic?

**I:** The syllabus is in fact quite good but I think it's a bit too easy for pupils. For beginners, they are perfect but for primary five and six pupils, it is too easy.

**R:** In your opinion, why do you think the TOC syllabus was published in the year 1997?

**I:** I don't know when it was first started, I mean, the planning stage. Perhaps it's the changeover and to commensurate with the education reform.

**R:** Have you got any curriculum development experience at your school?

**I:** I know there is a curriculum development officer but the English panel chairperson did most of the task. I did not participate or give opinions because I haven't joined the meeting yet. You know, at school, it's not entirely fair and I'm just a junior teacher. It's been lucky that she didn't black mouth me and also she won't listen to me, right? Usually it's the panel chair and the senior teachers who give opinions, though it can be my school's problem.

**R:** Can you tell me how do you make use of the syllabus as a reference or a guideline in your teaching? Do you just read and use the concepts casually in your teaching or check the syllabus from time to time and follow the syllabus consistently?

**I:** I read the chapter and see what the pupils are expected to learn, for example "What do you like?" They have to learn "do" and "like" and when the subject is "you", they should use "do" rather than "does". I have all these in my mind and I'll see the standard of the pupils and pick a method to teach them. Anyway, I have to teach them all these things. And the guidelines are just reference for me because they are so many variables at that time.

**R:** Besides the guidelines deployed by the government, do you refer to other guidelines as well?

**I:** I don't know there are other guidelines, I don't know.

**R:** What about the school-based one? The government one is more comprehensive and all primary schools in Hong Kong may use that one, but would there be a guideline that belong to your school or a more specific one?

**I:** That thing! The words are so abstract and the ideas, in my opinion, are written with the Education Department in mind. It is for them to read, I think. I don't think they are useful at all.

**R:** Let me ask one final question. According to the CDC, there will be a new subject guide out in 2002, and as a teacher, what would you like to see changes in the syllabus?

**I:** Changes, mmmm.... lessen the workload would be better because if we really do all the pre-task and post-task activities, we won't be able to finish all teaching. There shouldn't be so many exercises and I always feel that I can't do games in every lessons. I feel they like to play games but... I think reading is the most boring activity, especially in lower grades, extremely boring. How to play? You ask them to do role-play and they can't. They can't even pronounce the words, like after Panda has said and then the next character says something else. They can't manage that. It's the dulllest part, and playing the tape as well. I can't think of any methods to teach those. And most of the time, the characters are animals and the pupils can relate them to theirs. It's not like acting their Dad and Mom. I always feel that the pupils not knowing what's happening around. And abruptly, words like "beautiful" and "crocodile" appear in primary two's readings. That words shouldn't be on that chapter but all of a sudden, they appear and I have to teach. Some weaker pupils find them so difficult. I think the reading part can be improved. I'm not certain whether it's my fault of knowing how to teach of whatever....

**R:** Do you have anything to add or ask me a question? I'll try my best to answer.

**I:** Almost...

**R:** Anything to add?

**I:** No, nothing I can say more about the TOC.

**R:** Thank you so much for accepting my interview.





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